

AN EXAMINATION OF NHL FANS' REACTIONS TO THE
CANCELLED 2004-2005 SEASON

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ABSTRACT

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Gary Bettman, the Commissioner of the National Hockey League (NHL) stepped in front of the worldwide media on February 16, 2005 to announce that there would be no NHL games played during the 2004-2005 season. Two sides were prominent during the labour dispute; the NHL owners and the NHLPA, however a third side that became the forgotten party was the fans (NHLFA, 2005). The fans are the consumers of the NHL and all the brands associated with its franchises, they are the people who provide the revenues that allow owners to pay the players' salaries.

The present study is situated within the sport marketing framework, particularly within the fan loyalty literature to provide an understanding of the impact of the 2004-2005 lockout on the forgotten party, NHL fans. This study examines 16 fans' experiences in four stages: becoming a fan of the NHL, being a fan prior to the lockout, being a fan during the lockout including their anticipated reaction to the return of the NHL, and their actual reaction to the return of the NHL. Data was collected using face-to-face interviews with each of the participants, resulting in 16 fans' stories of how the lockout impacted them specifically.

Through analysis of the data themes began to emerge including the fans' understanding that there was a need to restructure game play, the business operations of the NHL, a desire for service recovery strategies which would exceed fans' expectations,

and the desire for alternative forms of consumption including alternative hockey leagues as well as the growing popularity of poker playing.

The study summarizes the effects that the NHL lockout had on the relationship between 16 individual fans and their favourite teams, and concludes with Suggestions for Future Research and Implications for Sport Marketers that emerged from this unique case in the history of North American professional sport.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Gary Bettman, the Commissioner of the National Hockey League (NHL) stepped in front of the worldwide media on February 16, 2005 to announce that there would be no NHL games played during the 2004-2005 season. The season had effectively been cancelled due to the inability of the NHL ownership and the National Hockey League Players' Association (NHLPA), which represents all players in the NHL, to come to an agreement concerning an arrangement that would govern the business partnership between the owners and the players for the upcoming seasons. The issue of work stoppages in professional sport is one that has become much more prominent in recent years with the emergence of players' unions. However, the NHL now has the illustrious distinction of being the first major professional sport league in North America to lose an entire season due to a labour dispute.

The forgotten party throughout this process remained the fans of the NHL. These are people who include young children, college/university students, blue/white collar workers, executives, to senior citizens. These people are those who happen to choose the NHL as a form of entertainment. As Hyatt (2003) noted, the choice to follow a particular professional sport league/team grows from a simple form of entertainment to a passion in some.

The National Hockey League Fans' Association (NHLFA, 2005), is a non-profit organization that was created to provide fans of the NHL with a voice. The NHLFA has stated that the NHL executives and the NHLPA have become so concerned with the issue of the amount of money that the players should be entitled to earn that they have not

acknowledged the issue of how they are negatively affecting NHL fans. The NHLFA asked the owners and the players to acknowledge the fans, the people who provide both parties with their revenue. This is the same revenue that enables the owners to pay the players' salaries.

The present study is situated within a sport marketing framework, particularly within the fan loyalty literature, to provide an understanding of the impact of the 2004-2005 lockout on NHL fans. After reviewing the findings, a set of recommendations have been provided for sport marketers to help them reconnect with fans of their leagues and perhaps to recruit more fans following a cancelled season. The study also contributes to marketing literature, as it is an investigation of the emotions and behaviours of loyal consumers of a brand when the brand is not available.

Professional Sports in North America

Professional sports have become the choice of entertainment for many in North America. As a result, the professional sports industry has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry - lucrative for many who have been able to capitalize on the potential money making ventures.

The North American professional sport community has witnessed the emergence of four major professional sport leagues in the past century (Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the National Football League, and the National Hockey League). As these four leagues developed into powerful revenue generating organizations, they saw the emergence of players' associations that acted as unions protecting their members' interests - especially financially. The introduction of the players' associations has been accompanied by several labour disputes:

- MLB – 1981 and 1994 (cancelled season and playoffs)
- NBA – 1998
- NFL – 1982 and 1987
- NHL – 1992, 1994-1995, and 2004-2005 (the lockout under study)

(Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005).

A great concern of fans of the four major professional sport leagues is that average ticket prices have become too high (Corelli & Came, 1996). There are exceptions when teams do reduce ticket prices for individual games. These exceptions tend to take the form of promotional events when franchises offer reduced ticket prices for specific games, however these are not everyday occurrences. The average fan (middle class population) is less likely to attend a normal game day event due to the prohibitive cost of tickets than someone with a large amount of disposable income (Corelli & Came, 1996). Bannister (2005) noted what each league's teams charge for tickets. The NFL holds the highest average ticket price for their 32-team league at \$55 (U.S. dollars) per ticket, and an average cost of \$322 (U.S. dollars) for a family of four to attend the game and purchase two programs, parking, two souvenir caps and refreshments (two small beers, four small soft drinks, four hot dogs). In comparison, the NHL has an average ticket price of \$44 (U.S. dollars) per ticket to attend one of their 30 franchises' home games, and they have an average cost of \$254 (U.S. dollars) for a family of four to attend the game and purchase two programs, parking, two souvenir caps and refreshments (two small beers, four small soft drinks, four hot dogs).

Considering that the NFL plays only eight home games per season, as compared to the 41 home games that each NHL franchise plays per year, the NFL's relative ticket

price may be viewed as reasonable in comparison to that of the NHL. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) explain that the relative price for brand related consumables is related to the perceived value that the consumer holds for a brand. As the perceived value increases, the consumer will be more apt to pay a higher price for the brand than will a consumer who has a lower perceived value of the brand. With the NFL playing fewer regular season games than the NHL, fans may perceive NFL tickets to have a greater value, because each game holds greater importance for NFL teams than they do for NHL teams.

Positioning this Study

A majority of the academic work in the fan loyalty literature has been conducted using traditional positivist methods in the functionalist paradigm, such as using surveys and questionnaires to find mathematically significant relationships between variables (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kolbe & James, 2000; 2003; Miller & Fielding, 1997; Wakefield, 1995; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). Hyatt (2003) explains that...

functionalist researchers view the world as having an objective reality external to individuals. They would study such concepts as loyalty in order to discover what they believe to be generalizable universal statements. Phenomena are conceptualized in terms of law-like relationships where changes to separate and discrete antecedent variables are thought to lead to changes in separate and discrete consequent variables (p. 11).

Positivistic research commonly state hypotheses, which are then supported or not supported by the use of quantitative methods. Very little fan loyalty research has used interpretive methods to investigate the impact of sporting experiences on the lives of fans.

Interpretive methods are different from positivistic methods, as interpretive methods allow researchers to search for meanings rather than law-like relationships (Hyatt, 2003). Interpretive researchers often utilize in-depth interviews to create an open-ended discussion between themselves and the informants participating in their study. The researchers encourage the informants to discuss their experience(s) with the phenomena under investigation, and from these discussions, researchers are able to draw how these experiences have shaped the individuals' lives (Patton, 2002). Interpretive researchers feel that the individual is the one who can best explain how a phenomenon has affected his/her life. In turn, researchers can draw conclusions from the stories expressed by the individuals they have interviewed. Interpretive researchers are interested in the phenomena under investigation, and how it has affected the individual who is sharing their experiences, not how the phenomenon affects the world as a whole, but rather the individuals that discussed the experience as it pertained to them. "As such, interpretive researchers often discover interesting subtleties and nuances that researchers would not have thought of a priori and thus could not have been captured on a functionalist data-gathering instrument" (Hyatt, 2003, p. 10). An interpretive investigation of NHL fans experiences prior to, during, and upon the completion of the 2004-2005 NHL lockout may have uncovered insights into fan loyalty that traditional positivists methods could not.

Positivism, also know as functionalist research (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) is research using quantifiable measures. Much of the sport marketing and fan loyalty research has been based predominantly in the functionalist paradigm. The research in these areas has focused on quantifiable measures such as motivation, identification, and

attachment to provide sport marketers with strategies used to increase revenue. However, as alluded to by Hyatt (2003), very little has been done to allow sport consumers/spectators/fans to tell their personal stories in their own words. Functionalist quantitative researchers have done a great deal of work to categorize fans' relationships with their favourite teams, and to categorize the levels of attachment one has with a team (Funk & James, 2001). However, they grouped fans along structured dimensions, into categories that may not always be agreed upon by the fans. For example, McDonald and Milne (1997) published a paper in which they categorized customers into two dimensions, resulting in four categories. Customers who showed high relational strength but a low financial relationship with the team, thus fitting into their third of four cells were labeled marginal fans. It became apparent that the authors were indicating that the individuals who fell into the first (high emotional and high financial investments) and second (low emotional and high financial investments) stages were viewed as optimal fans. It would be interesting to have a marginal fan's perspective on that label, if someone does not have a large amount of disposable income to use on professional sport. Is it justified to consider them marginal fans relative to fans who have the same emotional attachment to the team but possess more resources to spend on consuming the brand?

Through the use of interpretive qualitative methods, the researcher was able to establish a personal relationship with the informants, creating a conducive environment to generate the exchange of richer information from the participants. The use of interpretive methods in the investigation of the 2004-2005 NHL lockout may have provided the necessary environment for individuals to express the emotions that the phenomena

invoked in them. The investigation provides an insider's perspective into the experiences of the NHL fans throughout the process of the lockout.

Methodology

This investigation is concerned with the impact that the 2004-2005 NHL lockout has had on the experience of being a fan of the NHL. The experience is framed in four-part dimensions, which were examined during interviews with several fans. The first stage addresses the events that led to the individual becoming a fan of the NHL, presuming that no one is born a fan. This stage was concerned with the team to which the fan has become loyal and their perceptions of that team's success in competition and/or its status relative to other league teams. The second stage in the process dealt with the fans' experiences of the NHL prior to any mention of a labour dispute. The third stage dealt with the fans' experiences throughout the lockout (how they dealt with the lockout and how their lives may have changed during the lockout). This third stage also included the fans' recollections of how they anticipated reacting to the return of NHL competition, both their anticipated attitudinal and behavioural reactions. The fourth and final stage dealt with the fans' actual reactions to the return of NHL competition.

Sixteen NHL fans were interviewed in this study. All fans met the criteria established to label them as current fans of the NHL; met the criteria of either attachment or allegiance, established by Funk and James in their Psychological Continuum Model (2001), to a team in the NHL. The Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2001) classifies fans into four categories (awareness, attraction, attachment, or allegiance) based on their bond with a team. A seventeenth participant was scheduled to be interviewed, but during the initial conversation between the informant and the

researcher, the informant did not convey the necessary emotional and behavioural attachment with his favourite team to fall within the desired stages of the Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2001).

James (2001) stated that a person first becomes a fan of a sport, then of a league, then a team, and could then become a fan of a player. It can then be presumed that if a fan proves to be loyal to an NHL team, that they are also loyal to the NHL.

Each interview was conducted in person, in a face-to-face fashion. To ensure that all four dimensions of the process are covered, a set of questions were created to ensure that each dimension was covered. A majority of the questions were open-ended and participants were encouraged to tell the stories of the lockout experience as they saw them. Each interview was audiotape recorded (with consent of the informants), and then the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The stories that were contained in these transcripts were analyzed to understand the NHL fans experiences surrounding the 2004-2005 lockout.

An Introduction to Fan Loyalty Research

This study is based on the stories that fans of the NHL have shared concerning their experiences during the 2004-2005 lockout. The fans were asked to share their experiences as they pertained to becoming a fan of the NHL, being a fan prior to the lockout, being a fan during the lockout including their anticipated reaction to the return of the NHL, and their actual reaction upon the return of NHL action.

Existing consumer relationship management literature accepts the notion that loyal sport fans may follow their favourite sport and their favourite team for different

reasons. This suggests that it would be possible to uncover unique stories from each individual as to how their NHL fandom affects them personally.

Previous sport marketing literature has used the term sport consumer synonymously with sport spectator, follower, or fan (Boyd & Krehbiel, 1999; Funk & James, 2001; 2004; Kolbe & James, 2000; Kolbe & James, 2003; Funk, Mahony & Havitz, 2003, Gladden & Funk, 2002; Stewart, Smith, & Nicholson, 2003; Wann et al., 1996). However, in a recent study, Hyatt (2003) considered a psychologically driven definition of sport fan as being someone who cares about the team. Hyatt (2003) states that fans are emotionally involved with the team; wins and losses by the team psychologically affect their fans.

Researchers have expended a great deal of effort into categorizing fans based on differing levels of loyalty. Funk and James (2001) created the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) composed of four levels of connection that one has with a sport team (awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance). Awareness is the first stage and one is categorized as aware when he/she first learn of the team. Attraction, the second stage, is when an individual acknowledges a favourite team or league. Attachment, the third stage, is when a psychological connection has been formed between the individual and the team. The fourth and final stage, allegiance, is when the individual has become completely loyal to the team. For the purpose of the present study, participants had to demonstrate psychological connections worthy of being classified in either the attachment or the allegiance dimension. The participants had to be fans of an NHL team. They had to demonstrate emotional investment in that NHL team, and they had to demonstrate behaviours in consuming the brand.

Limitations

This study relies exclusively on the stories told by NHL fans concerning their experiences before, during, and after the process of the 2004-2005 NHL lockout. The study relies on experiences that the individuals have had over a time spanning more than a year. Thus, the investigator has relied on the accuracy of the stories, even though some of the experiences may have taken place over a year prior to the interview.

It was not possible to observe the fans' actions during the lockout, to verify that their accounts of their actions are accurate. People may have said one thing based on their recollections but then did another when they were actually presented the choice of what to do during an evening where they would usually have chosen to watch an NHL game. It could have been beneficial to attend local pubs and observe the behaviours of local patrons who would usually be watching hockey, to see what they chose to do to replace hockey during the lockout. It may also have been beneficial to listen to the conversations that the patrons were having with other customers and note their opinions concerning the NHL and the lockout in particular as it was occurring.

Finally, the NHL is a league that spans across North America, but for the purpose of the present study, the fans who took part in the study are all from South Western and Southern Ontario, as well as Western New York. These fans were chosen for convenience (i.e., proximity to the researcher). Given their location, these fans share similarities with one another, including geography and exposure to the sporting media that are prevalent in these areas of the two countries. The media in the areas tend to focus on one to three particular teams per sport rather than focus equally on each team of the professional sport leagues. They would share certain similarities with fans throughout the

NHL, however they would also have many characteristics that are distinctly their own. Fans in the Southern United States may perceive the lockout differently than the informants in this study. It could be presumed that a fan of the Tampa Bay Lightning was affected by the lockout differently than a fan of the Montréal Canadiens. Due to the geographic constraints, the present study may not be transferable to all fans of the NHL nor to all franchises of the NHL.

The Author as a Sport Fan

I am a sport fanatic. I follow every major sport league with a high level of attachment. I am a former varsity athlete, competing in football during my undergraduate years at my hometown university in South Western Ontario. My hometown is located in between Toronto and Detroit, but I chose to affiliate myself with Toronto hockey, baseball, and basketball teams rather than teams located in Detroit. I am a loyal follower of the Toronto Maple Leafs of the NHL, the Buffalo Bills of the NFL, the Toronto Blue Jays of MLB, and the Toronto Raptors of the NBA. Competing at a high level has given me a better appreciation for what athletes must invest to prepare themselves to play day in and day out.

As with most fans of professional sport teams (James, 2001), my choices for the teams that I followed were influenced by family and geographical proximity. My older brothers influenced my choice of NHL teams; they both cheered for the Toronto Maple Leafs and they taught me about the history of the franchise. The games that were viewed on television in my house while growing up were predictably Toronto Maple Leafs games. To this day, the Toronto hockey product has continued to be the franchise of choice in my house.

I was introduced to the Buffalo Bills by my father at a young age. Ever since, we have been cheering for the team and are currently season ticket holders at Ralph Wilson Stadium, the home of the Buffalo Bills. As for the Toronto Blue Jays and the Toronto Raptors, I am a loyal fan of these teams as well, yet to a lesser extent than I am with the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Buffalo Bills. I would be considered attached to these two franchises, whereas I would be considered to be in the allegiance stage for the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Buffalo Bills using the Funk and James's (2001) Psychological Continuum Model.

Thus, I relate to NHL fans in that I have experienced the lockout. I truly missed the competition of the NHL during the 2004-2005 season. This has allowed for rich conversations, as the informants were able to recognize that they were sharing their stories with a knowledgeable sport fan who may have shared similar experiences.

Rationale for the Study

Examining the stories of loyal fans of the NHL will help to explain what the 2004-2005 lockout has meant to individuals who are impacted by NHL franchises and the NHL as a league. It will also help to explain what detrimental impact the lockout has had on the business of the NHL if any. The study will also present strategies that may help sport marketers decrease the negative impacts to work stoppages. These strategies will be drawn from the analysis of the fans stories.

The present research was dominated by one particular question.

1. What was the impact of the NHL lockout on the experience of being a fan?

A great deal of research that has been done concerning fan loyalty has examined fans who follow their favourite team while consumption is accessible to the participants

(Gladden & Funk, 2002; Miller & Fielding, 1997; Wakefield, 1995, Wann et al., 1996).

The NHL found itself in hiatus because of a labour dispute that could not be settled resulting in the cancellation of a season. Four dimensions were examined: becoming a fan of the NHL, being a fan prior to the lockout, being a fan during the lockout including their anticipated reaction to the return of the NHL, and their actual reaction to the return of the NHL.

A secondary set of questions dealt with the differences expected to be found between fans of small market teams and large market teams in the NHL.

2. Do small market team fans' and large market team fans' experiences differ?

Research has shown that loyal consumers of weak brands and strong brands do differ (Baldinger & Robinson, 1996; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). For the present study, as it is concerned with NHL, what they refer to weak brands I will refer to as small market teams, and what they refer to as strong brands I will refer to as large market teams. In the case of the NHL lockout, a great deal of the conflict has been caused by the league seeking cost certainty by introducing a salary cap. This would predictably help the small market teams to compete with the large market teams. It is a common occurrence in professional sport for the small market teams to be unable to compete with the large market teams because they do not have the same resources to invest in player salaries. Therefore, these teams are less able to attract the best players in comparison to the large market teams. It may then be the case that small market team fans had sided with the NHL and were willing to wait as long as needed to ensure that there is a level playing field between their team and the large market teams. Whereas the large market team fans

may have wanted the lockout to end early because the previous Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) allowed their team to benefit.

An example of this notion presented itself in an article by Jones (2005) in the *Edmonton Sun* on August 3, 2005. This was the day following the signing of Chris Pronger, a coveted defenseman in the NHL. Jones (2005) wrote that if there were fans of the Edmonton Oilers (a small market team) still with any doubts that losing a year of the NHL was not worth it, this signing should eliminate those. Meanwhile Sportak (2005) wrote in the *Calgary Sun* that fans of large market teams were not happy about the new CBA. His response was not one filled with sympathy, but rather one where he told people to “live with it”. He feels that these teams are now paying for their previous actions that caused the financial woes that the NHL has recently been experiencing.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter one explained that this study is simultaneously positioned in the interpretive paradigm and the sport marketing field, particularly within the fan loyalty literature. It was noted that the experience was examined as a four-part process. Chapter two provides a contextual background on the phenomena under study. A background of the NHL is provided along with a background of the CBA process that has led to the lockout. Chapter three provides a review of literature as it pertains to a service failure and recovery, as well as the four dimensions of becoming a fan of the NHL, being a fan prior to the lockout, being a fan during the lockout including fans’ anticipated reaction to the return of the NHL, and their actual reaction to the return of the NHL. The literature review focuses on sport marketing and fan loyalty literature, but also addresses mainstream marketing literature when appropriate. Chapter four addresses the

interpretive paradigm followed by an explanation of the methods used for the study.

Chapter five presents the fans' experiences and provides an interpretive analysis of these experiences, citing commonalities and differences between individuals, as well as previous research and theories. Chapter six provides readers with the author's final thoughts concerning what was learned from the experiences of NHL fans during the 2004-2005 lockout, the contribution of this research to the literature, and potential considerations for NHL executives and marketing researchers.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT

National Hockey League (NHL)

As reported by NHL.com (2005), the emergence of professional hockey leagues began with the creation of the International Pro League in 1904. The IPL was based in an iron-mining region of the Michigan Upper Peninsula. In 1907, a short time after its creation, the IPL folded. The folding of the IPL coincided with the emergence of two even bigger leagues, the National Hockey Association (NHA) and the Pacific Coast League (PCL). In 1914, a transcontinental series was arranged to be played between the two leagues for the coveted Lord Stanley's Cup (the oldest trophy in professional sports). The Stanley Cup is named after a former English Governor General of Canada. At the time of World War I, the men who ran the professional hockey leagues decided to suspend operations.

After the 1st World War, the powers of professional hockey decided to form a new organization known as the National Hockey League (NHL). At its inception, the NHL boasted 5 franchises, the Montréal Canadiens, the Montreal Wanderers, the Ottawa Senators, the Québec Bulldogs, and the Toronto Arenas. The league's first game was played December 19, 1917. The winning team from the NHL then met the winning team of the already existing PCL for Lord Stanley's Cup until 1926 when the PCL folded. In 1919, the championship was not awarded due to an influenza outbreak. After the PCL folded, the NHL took control of the Stanley Cup. By 1926 the franchises now known as the original six (Boston Bruins, Chicago Blackhawks, Detroit Red Wings, Montréal Canadiens, New York Rangers, and Toronto Maple Leafs) were established.

The NHL has experienced tremendous growth over the decades, and is now comprised of 30 franchises (6 Canadian and 24 American). The 89-year old league has experienced many highs and many lows in its popularity among North Americans. The Montréal Canadiens and the Toronto Maple Leafs have one of the fiercest rivalries in all of professional sports, earning 35 of the NHL's 88 championships between the two franchises.

Collective Bargaining Agreement

January 13, 1995 marked the conclusion of the 1994-1995 National Hockey League (NHL) labour dispute that up until the 2004-2005 NHL lockout had resulted in the second longest shutdown in professional sport history. Half of the 1994-1995 NHL season was lost to the NHL players' holdout. The labour dispute was rectified when both parties were able to come to a compromise regarding each others' demands for the future of the NHL business relations. The Collective Bargaining Agreement that was introduced in early 1995 would govern the NHL for the next nine years (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005). The terms of the 1994-1995 Collective Bargaining Agreement are outlined below:

- **Term:** Expires September 15, 2000. But, if the league or the players choose, either side can renegotiate it at the end of the 1997-1998 season. The 1995 CBA was extended twice, thus was the CBA in effect until the 2004-2005 lockout.
- **Draft:** Players are automatically eligible at age 19, although 18-year-olds have the right to elect to be drafted.
- **Entry-level compensation:** The maximum annual salary for rookies in the 1995 draft is \$850,000/year; the scale rises to \$1,075,000/year by the year 2000.

- **Unrestricted free agency:** Players 32 or older can sign with any team at the end of their contract during the first three years of the new agreement; during the final three years, they become free agents at 31.
- **Salary arbitration:** Most players are ineligible for arbitration in their first five years in the league. Arbitration is not completely binding: clubs are allowed to walk away from three award decisions every two years, making the players free agents (Deacon & Hawaleshka, 1995, p. 44-45).

In [Red Line Blue Line Bottom Line], Edge (2004) examined the precursors to the lockout of 2004-2005. Edge provided evidence that following the introduction of the 1995 CBA, financial and sport experts were claiming that the NHL owners and the league emerged as the winners over the NHLPA in their efforts to keep salaries from rising. The sport experts felt that the restrictions on rookie salaries and free agency were a win in the owners' favour. The restrictions were predicted to reduce the average NHL salary from that day forward. However, within two years of the implementation of the 1995 CBA, the average NHL salary had risen from \$730,000 to \$1.17 million per season, by 2001 the average salary had continued to rise up to \$1.42 million per season, and at the end of the 2003-2004 season the average salary had tripled from the average in 1995. The average NHL salary was now \$1.79 million. It became apparent that the sport experts had ignored the rule of supply and demand. The rich teams continued to spend large amounts of money on salaries to entice the best players to join their franchises.

As the 2003-2004 season was drawing to a conclusion, the hockey world was bracing for perhaps the ugliest labour dispute in league/professional sport history. Many experts had predicted before the expiration of the 1995 CBA that a league-wide lockout

would occur (Farber, 2004; Farber, Bechtel, & Cannella, 2004). Unfortunately for the two parties involved, the NHL and the NHLPA, the timing of the expiration of the CBA came when the NHL was at one of its lowest points of popularity in the United States in years. Farber (2004) reports that “the rating of Game 3 for the final on ABC was 1.4, the second lowest for any prime-time show in the history of the major networks” (p. 51). This was not a good sign for a professional league that was quickly approaching what many predicted to be a nasty and lengthy work stoppage. If fans were not interested in the league during the pinnacle of its season, the Stanley Cup finals, then why should NHL and NHLPA executives expect them to care if the league cancelled a season?

The nine-year term that was governed by the past CBA was in the owners’ point of view clearly much more favourable for the NHL players than the NHL owners. NHL player salaries grew from a total of \$414 Million (U.S. dollars) in 1993-1994 to \$1.494 Billion (U.S. dollars) in 2002-2003 (NHL, 2005). In 1993-1994, 57 per cent of league revenues went to the payment of player salaries, while in 2002-2003, this figure had risen to 75 per cent. Over the past CBA nine-year term, league revenues had only risen 173 per cent while NHL players’ salaries had risen 261 per cent (NHL, 2005). After the completion of the 2002-2003 season, it was reported by the NHL (2005) that there were only 11 profitable teams as compared to 19 non-profitable teams, with a combined loss of approximately \$9.1 million (U.S. dollars) when combining the operating costs of all 30 NHL teams. Financial experts have suggested that the NHLPA must consider these alarming figures and realize that they need to rectify the issue of the league losing millions of dollars in order to help the league survive (Dale & Loughnane, 2004). Dale and Loughnane stated that unless the NHLPA and its members learn to appreciate the

mutual benefits that can be derived from league parity and revenue sharing, a long lockout would surely loom.

The NHLPA disagreed with this statement. They had heard these cries from owners throughout the history of the NHL:

... For years, NHL owners cried poverty and implored players to settle for less 'for the good of the game'. Even as recently as negotiations for the 1986 agreement, when the NHL was experiencing unprecedented prosperity with surging attendance and increased television revenues, they claimed that higher salaries bought by free agency would bankrupt many teams (Edge, 2004, p. 11-12).

The players accepted these pleas from owners as their NHLPA Executive Director Alan Eagleson sold them on the owners' arguments. Thus, the players agreed to settle for less money in exchange for better pensions. However, the players never received/benefited from this pension. Many of the NHL owners and Alan Eagleson took the money that rightfully belonged to the players' pension funds and put it in their own bank accounts, leaving these players with very little money upon their retirement from hockey (Edge, 2004).

The bleak history for NHL players changed in 1991 when Eagleson, who would later be sentenced to 18 months in prison for his actions as NHLPA Executive Director, was replaced by a Harvard Law graduate, Bob Goodenow. Goodenow was the man who negotiated the 1995 CBA that had generated great increases in salaries for NHL players since its introduction. Goodenow would no longer accept owners' cries of poverty. The NHLPA conducted their own financial investigations of NHL franchises and were able to

find millions of dollars in unreported revenue (Edge, 2004). From this point forward the NHLPA became a worthy adversary in contractual negotiations with the NHL. The NHLPA would no longer be a silent party (Edge, 2004).

On September 14, 2004, the CBA expired. This expiration was accompanied by a league-wide lockout implemented by the NHL Commissioner (Gary Bettman). The announcement of the lockout resulted in the suspension of NHL operations. Training camps were cancelled, and franchise and arena employees' hours were cut back and/or eliminated. Both the NHL and NHLPA participated in attacks against one another through media outlets (Frank, 2005). Frequent headlines were reporting that the NHL and the NHLPA were ignoring the third party that was being most affected throughout this process, the fans: "Prince of Pucks: Fans not important in CBA talks" (Spector, 2005), "Fans ignored in NHL talks" (CBC News Online, 2004), and "NHL Fans the innocent victims of lockout insanity" (Scanlan, 2004). An organization that was created to give a voice to fans of the NHL, the National Hockey League Fans' Association (NHLFA) went so far as to draft an open letter to Gary Bettman (Commissioner, NHL) and Bob Goodenow (Executive Director, NHLPA). The NHLFA proposed that the NHL and NHLPA sit down with a third party mediator that would be selected by the Fans' Association to help bring the two parties (NHL and NHLPA) to a resolution (NHLFA, 2004).

Warren (2004) predicted that the concern over the delay of the commencement of the NHL season would not be of great concern to U.S. citizens. However, it would be of great concern to Canadian citizens. A study was conducted in November 2004, surveying 503 households in the Canadian capital, Ottawa. The results did not support the

predictions made in Warren's (2004) article. More specifically, it was found that more than 60 per cent of those Canadians surveyed did not miss the NHL (Warren, 2004). The results indicated that 61 per cent did not miss the NHL, 38 per cent did, and one per cent did not know if they missed the league or not. Warren stated that these results were similar to those uncovered by the NHLFA in a study in which they surveyed 27,000 North American NHL fans.

As alarming as it was for both parties that fans were not concerned with the delay of the NHL season, one could have predicted it being less concerning for the NHL than it would be for the NHLPA. The reason for this is that a majority of the fans surveyed as to who they blamed for the lockout and/or who they felt had more reasonable demands sided with the owners. The NHL (2005) posted the results of an Ipsos-Reid poll surveying 1000 Canadians that was undertaken for TSN that showed that 59 per cent of Canadians believe the owners were being more reasonable than the players while 16 per cent felt the players were more reasonable. The poll went even further showing that 50 per cent of Canadians would blame the players more if there were no season versus 21 per cent who would blame the owners. The support for the NHL rather than the NHL players may have been in part due to the NHL's public relations efforts that were focused on demonstrating that they were not trying to be unreasonable, but that they needed to fix the economic structure of the league. Gary Bettman was quoted, "We don't want to pay the players less than we can afford and we're not prepared to pay more than we can afford" (NHL, 2005). The NHL executives have been adamant that they cannot afford to pay the players' salaries. As previously stated, 75 per cent of the NHL's gross revenues goes to player payrolls. This is compared to 64 per cent in the National Football League

(NFL), 63 per cent in Major League Baseball (MLB), and 55 per cent in the National Basketball Association (NBA) (Farber, 2004).

The NHLPA rebutted the accusations of NHL owners that they were simply looking to pay players what they could afford by providing evidence that owners had hidden revenue from the media. Throughout the history of professional sport, owners have not always reported some forms of revenue generated such as advertising in the stadiums and luxury boxes (Edge, 2004). These two forms of revenue generation accounted for millions of dollars.

The months that followed the implementation of the league-wide lockout can be described as a tug of war over public support between the two parties. There were many allegations made regarding the ineffectiveness of the opposite party to meet the demands of the other (Campbell, 2005). On February 16, 2005, the NHL Commissioner, Gary Bettman, officially cancelled the 2004-2005 NHL season. Gary Bettman and Bob Goodenow were being represented in the media as the two principal figures in the negotiations, and therefore took the majority of the blame for the inability of the two sides to come to an agreement (Frank, 2005). The personal issues between the leaders of the respective parties were highlighted in the article, and it was proposed that this personal feud may have prevented a deal from being negotiated.

Early in the CBA negotiation process, there were very few moments of hope for fans. Shortly after the cancellation of the season, two of the most prominent figures in professional hockey (Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux, both owning shares of NHL teams) were allegedly optimistic that a compromise would occur in the near future (Campbell, 2005). According to Campbell (2005), Gretzky felt the league did not put its

best proposal forward, but felt he could influence owners to reopen negotiations.

Members of the NHLPA echoed these same feelings, concerning inadequate attempts to negotiate. Steve Yzerman, the Detroit Red Wings captain claimed it was “not too late to uncanceled it [NHL season]” (Campbell, 2005, p. E02), if the two sides could come to an agreement on a new CBA. Observers of the negotiations which included both NHL and NHLPA representatives were surprised that the two sides could not come to an agreement when the two parties were only \$6 million apart when it came to an agreed upon salary cap. However, when asked, Gary Bettman said that the NHLPA never asked to split their \$6 million difference, but NHLPA representatives denied these allegations (Campbell, 2005).

Negotiations continued much in this nature with one of the sides proposing a potential CBA, which the other would quickly reject. Neither side was viewed to be negotiating in good faith. This was evidenced by the petition that was filed by the NHLPA against the NHL in the provinces of British Columbia and Quebec. The petitions were an attempt to prevent the NHL from using replacement players if a new CBA was not agreed upon by the start of the next NHL season (NHL, 2005). The NHL was quick to combat the petition through media releases. On April 28, 2005, Bill Daly (NHL Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer) released a statement

... We believe these petitions are inconsistent with both the history and the reality of collective bargaining in this industry, and that the NHLPA's act of filing the petitions is inappropriate and in violation of its obligations under applicable labor legislation in the United States and Canada. Obviously, we will take appropriate

steps to preserve and protect our rights. Ultimately, these filings will have no impact on the League's business alternatives going forward ... (NHL, 2005).

A great deal of the process involved in the negotiations was leaked to the media and as a result, it became a battle of public relations between the NHL and the NHLPA. The first sign of true optimism occurred on May 20, 2005 after the two sides had met for a total of 22 hours in two days (TSN, 2005). The NHL and the NHLPA sat in a boardroom for 14 hours on the Thursday followed by an eight-hour session the very next day. This was arguably the first true sign of both sides focusing on the negotiation of a new contract. Officials from both sides admitted that progress had been made. Bill Daly of the NHL was quoted, "We had two long days of meetings in which the parties discussed and made progress on some of the key issues pertaining to a new economic system" (Sportsnet, 2005). Although these meetings proved to be the first in the lengthy process that called for optimism on the part of the fans, the media still cautioned fans not to get too excited by these events. But, for the first time since the lockout began the previous September, it was not premature to believe that a Collective Bargaining Agreement could be reached within the next two months (TSN, 2005). This was the first instance where NHL fans could see an end to the lockout looming.

On Friday July 22, 2005, the 2004-2005 NHL lockout officially ended. The 301-day lockout had become the longest work stoppage in North American professional sport history. A day earlier the NHLPA voted in favour of accepting the CBA that had been negotiated by the executives of both parties. On July 22, the owners voted to ratify the agreement between the NHL and the NHLPA. This ratification marked the end of the lockout.

The general terms of the 2005 Collective Bargaining Agreement are outlined below:

- 24% across-the-board salary rollback
- A team salary cap of \$39 million
- An individual player cannot earn more than 20% of his team's payroll
- A linkage between salaries and revenues (salaries will increase as NHL revenues increase, and salaries will decrease as NHL revenues decrease) Farber (2005).

The main divisive issue that has consistently and continuously appeared between the NHL and the NHLPA is the salary cap. The NHL believed that a salary cap was necessary to operate a viable and successful league, while the NHLPA contended that their salaries should not be restricted. The issue of the salary cap will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

Salary Cap

The salary cap is a form of cost certainty that the league felt was necessary to be included in the CBA to help govern the operations of the NHL (Deacon, 2004). A salary cap is an instrument that has been implemented in professional sport leagues in recent years (Farber, 2004). Farber (2004) explains that the salary cap places a restriction on the amount that a franchise can spend on players' salaries for a season. Gary Bettman is considered the father of the salary cap (Edge, 2004). Bettman was the man who introduced the cap in the NBA during their negotiations in the mid 1980s. The NHL owners hired Bettman and gave him the title of Commissioner with one purpose in mind. That purpose was that Bettman would implement a salary cap in the NHL (Edge, 2004). The NHL is aiming to create a partnership with the players by creating a new way of

dividing \$2 billion in revenue, much the same as the NFL and NBA do. Even the MLB has a salary restriction in the form of a luxury tax and a process of revenue sharing between teams. A luxury tax is a fee paid by a franchise when their total salary surpasses a set amount that was agreed upon prior to each season. The luxury tax is implemented to govern the total amount that franchises can use towards salaries. The interest paid goes into a pool that is divided amongst other franchises in the league as the executives see fit.

Deacon (2004) explained the owners' perspective: "every other major North American sports league has needed some form of salary cap or payroll tax to flourish" (p. 47). The NFL has been referred to throughout the process as the model league. The NFL is considered the most successful league in North American professional sport (NHL, 2005). The NFL has been utilizing a salary cap for years within their Collective Bargaining Agreement. The NFL pays 64 per cent of their gross revenue to their players as compared to the 75 per cent that the NHL pays to its players (Farber, 2004). In a report presented by Sportsnet on October 11, 2004, Bob Goodenow was quoted "I can tell you this, we have not spoken to any NFL players that [sic] endorse their system" (NHL, 2005). Goodenow was suggesting that the NFL players were unhappy with the CBA and felt that it was unfair to be governed by a salary cap. Troy Vincent (NFLPA President) was quick to respond to these allegations by refuting the contention of Bob Goodenow, "It's two sides working together, beforehand, so that it doesn't get to this position that we're seeing in the NHL today. The cap has worked for us and we're in talks now for an extension. Our system works, it's proven itself...you look at those 32 owners, they're all on the same page. It's a shared revenue stream from top to bottom" (NHL, 2005).

Hines Ward, the Pittsburgh Steelers player representative agreed with Vincent: “I think the parity is what fans want, I think that in the NFL, we have it throughout the league because every year everyone has a chance. That’s all constructed through the salary cap” (NHL, 2005). The NHLPA points to the recent success of the Tampa Bay Lightning and the Calgary Flames, the two teams with relatively tight budgets that met in the 2003-2004 Stanley Cup final to show that good teams can be assembled on comparatively tight budgets without the implementation of a salary cap (Deacon, 2004). Deacon (2004) further states that the owners are aware of the potential success of small-budget teams, but that these teams cannot succeed consistently without increasing their payrolls.

Early on, Goodenow had taken an especially strong stand in the negotiations as it pertained to the issue of a salary cap. He argued that the players will never go for a cap (Deacon, 2004). As the negotiations unfolded Goodenow was been forced to show some flexibility towards the cap, because he was feeling pressure from members of his union to resolve the labour dispute (TSN, 2005). The NHL presented the NHLPA with a proposal containing a \$42.5 million cap on February 15, 2005 (Campbell, 2005). This was said to be the final offer the NHL would propose before they cancelled the season. The NHLPA counter-proposed with a \$47.5 million cap. Both sides refused each other’s proposal and the season was officially cancelled. The lockout continued until July 22, 2005 when both sides were able to come to an agreement containing a salary cap of \$39 million.

Summary

The process surrounding CBA negotiations was lengthy. The challenge now facing sport marketers for the NHL is to learn from the 2004-2005 lockout by minimizing

the negative impact of work stoppages on the consumption practices of fans of professional sport leagues. Marketers hope to reduce the negative effects of work stoppages. Understanding the experiences shared by the fans will shed light on their perspectives and may help sport marketers to better understand how fans have been affected by this labour dispute. As such, themes have emerged from the experiences of the fans that will allow professional sport executives to create strategies that may enable them to repair any league/player/fan relationships damaged by work stoppages.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This thesis aims to examine the impact of the 2004-2005 NHL lockout on the experience of being a fan. The fans' stories will be used to provide us with insight into what it is to be a fan of the NHL. The examination is concerned with four dimensions of these fans' fandom: becoming a fan, being a fan, living without the NHL due to the lockout including what they anticipated their attitudes and behaviours to be upon the return of the NHL, and actual attitudes and behaviours upon the return of the NHL. This research is positioned within the sport marketing framework; the focus is on consumer and fan behaviour with an emphasis on loyalty. Much of the research in sport marketing is a direct extension of the general marketing literature. Therefore, mainstream marketing research will be included in this review.

This chapter will review the literature that has dealt with these four dimensions of fandom within the consumer loyalty literature. The approach taken in this current study for the first two dimensions will mirror Hyatt's (2003) work. More specifically,

... building on earlier studies of sport fans by sociologists and psychologists, sport marketers and fan loyalty researchers have addressed how people become sport fans and what attitudes and behaviors characterize sport fans, including how strongly people identify with their favorite teams, what things associated with a sport or team fans find themselves attached to, and what might cause them to switch allegiances... (p. 26).

With respect to loyalty, this study will deal with the brand allegiance to the NHL and more specifically the NHL team to which the fan feels attachment.

This chapter will be broken into sections: service recovery, sport fans/consumers, becoming a loyal fan, small versus large market, and labour disputes in professional sport. The service recovery section examines literature that has dealt with recovery strategies for service providers upon the appearance of a service failure. The sport fans/consumers section explains the focus of this research that is fans' attachment to the NHL. Becoming a loyal consumer addresses the literature highlighting the most influential factors for creating and establishing emotional relationships with sport brands. The small versus large market section will refer to studies that have examined weak and strong brands. As the present study is concerned with the NHL, I will use the term small market rather than weak brand, and large market rather than strong brand. This section introduces the advantages that large market brands have tended to experience over their small market counterparts in the past. This section also explains previous research findings regarding the tendencies of the consumers of these respective brands. The final section, labour disputes, presents a historical background of work stoppages in North American professional sport over the past 25 years. In addition to this information, this section outlines findings of research that has dealt with the impact of past work stoppages on future business relations of the professional sport leagues.

Service Recovery

When a consumer's expectations of a service are not met it results in the individual perceiving a service failure to have occurred on the part of the service provider (Holloway & Beatty, 2003; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003; McCollough, Berry & Yadav, 2000; Smith & Bolton, 1998). According to McColl-Kennedy and Sparks (2003) a service failure leads to an emotional response by the consumer, and from there the

consumer then assesses the situation, considers procedural justice, interactional justice, and distributive justice elements, while engaging in counterfactual thinking and apportioning accountability. At the situational assessment stage the consumer expects to experience a service recovery attempt by the service provider. Smith and Bolton (1998) refer to a service recovery as the actions a service provider takes in response to a service failure. The loss of an entire NHL season can be perceived as a failure by both the NHL and the NHLPA to provide the service that their consumers are accustomed to experiencing. For that reason we will examine four studies (Holloway & Beatty, 2003; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003; McCollough, Berry & Yadav, 2000; Smith & Bolton, 1998) that have dealt with the phenomena of service recovery after a perceived service failure has taken place.

McColl-Kennedy and Sparks (2003) conducted a qualitative study in which they used focus groups to create a fairness theory-based conceptual framework for studying and managing consumers' emotions during service recovery attempts. They had 32 individuals participate in five focus groups. The authors chose to examine tourism failures for this particular study. They determined that there are four triggers for service failures: (a) problems with the service itself, (b) problems associated with the service provider, (c) problems outside the service provider's control, and (d) problems related to the customer (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003).

The results showed that customers accepted that things can go wrong and do go wrong, but the service provider must endeavor to do something about the problem in attempts to resolve it (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003). In the case of the NHL the fans must perceive that the two parties are attempting to do what is necessary to resolve the

issue at hand, if not, one or both of the parties will elicit negative emotions from the fans. The negative emotions are caused when the problem appears to be a simple solution in the mind of the consumers (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003). McColl-Kennedy and Sparks (2003) began to narrow these findings to situational effort, stating that consumers want effort put into this particular situation that has elicited negative emotions. As this pertains to the NHL lockout, it would be presumed that the fans expect the league and NHLPA to be determined and utilize all resources available to them to resolve the issue. Correspondingly, if the consumer does not feel that the service provider is putting enough effort into resolving the problem, then the customer is dissatisfied and angry (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003).

Smith and Bolton (1998) conducted an investigation into customers' reactions to service failure and recovery encounters. They aimed to uncover how a customer's satisfaction with a service failure and recovery encounter affected cumulative satisfaction judgments and repatronage intentions, to what extent a customer's prior satisfaction and repatronage intentions prior to the service failure influenced subsequent satisfaction and repatronage intentions after the service failure, and thirdly whether or not a highly satisfying service recovery can enhance a customer's overall satisfaction and repatronage intention with the service provider after a service failure (Smith & Bolton, 1998). Two separate studies were conducted: (1) in restaurants and (2) in hotels; both studies employed the use of surveys for data analysis.

The results indicated that customers have higher levels of satisfaction and repatronage intentions when they are more satisfied with the service providers' service recovery attempts when prior repatronage intentions were controlled for (Smith &

Bolton, 1998). If transferred to the intentions of NHL fans, you may determine that if they deem the NHL and NHLPA to have performed adequate service recovery attempts, their patronage would be at a higher level than if they were to deem the service recovery to fall short of their expectations. At the same time the effect of the customer's prior experiences with the service provider are not as powerful as their satisfaction with the service providers' recovery from the service failure when it comes to their intention to use the service in the future (Smith & Bolton, 1998).

An interesting finding as it would pertain to the NHL is that Smith and Bolton (1998) found that repatronage is lower if the customer thinks that the service failure is likely to happen again. Therefore, if a fan feels that a lockout is going to occur again at the end of the present CBA, or they expect that the NHL and/or NHLPA are going to fail them again they may not feel it is worth attaching themselves to something that could once again fail them in the near future. The study provided evidence that a single service failure/recovery encounter can substantially impact a customer's overall satisfaction and repatronage intentions with an organization (Smith & Bolton, 1998).

McCollough, Berry, and Yadav (2000) conducted an investigation into customer satisfaction after service failure and recovery in an airline setting. Quantitative methods were used to examine the relationship between service recovery and customer satisfaction. McCollough, Berry, and Yadav (2000) determined that the proper recovery from initial service failure can mitigate the damage to satisfaction caused by the failure. They suggest that service providers should strive to offer high-recovery performance that exceeds customer expectation when dealing with a service failure. This could be applied to the NHL's implementation of the new rule changes, in attempts to make the game

more fan friendly, perhaps exceeding their expectations. An interesting finding that was presented as a side note from the investigation is that most dissatisfied customers never bother to complain.

The fourth study dealing with service failure and recovery explored the phenomena in the realm of online retailing (Holloway & Beatty, 2003). The authors used a mixed-methods approach to the investigation. First they conducted in-depth interviews, followed by a survey that was distributed to a larger sample of online shoppers. The authors found that online service failures generally fell into one of six failure types: (a) delivery problems, (b) Web site design problems, (c) payment problems, (d) security problems, (e) problems with product quality, and (f) customer service problems.

Results showed that the number one reason to complain to the organization was to resolve the issue and receive retribution (Holloway & Beatty, 2003). The next two most prominent reasons to complain to the organization were the desire to express one's feelings and anger, and to make certain that the organization is aware of the problem. A large portion of the participants that stated they had complained revealed that they remained dissatisfied because they deserved more for the failure that they experienced (Holloway & Beatty, 2003). An alarmingly large proportion (65%) of respondents indicated that their negative experience would change their online shopping, and 37.4% reported that they would never purchase from the online company again (Holloway & Beatty, 2003). This could result in a negative acceptance of the NHL when it returns to play, if the fans have determined that the NHL and/or NHLPA have not put forth enough of an effort to recover from the service failure that the fans experienced.

The impact of the NHL lockout is a unique experience to each fan. The service that the NHL and their players provide to the fans is one of entertainment. The anomaly that presented itself during the lockout season of 2004-2005 may very well appear as a service failure to fans of the NHL. These four studies (Holloway & Beatty, 2003; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003; McCollough, Berry & Yadav, 2000; Smith & Bolton, 1998) indicate that what fans may expect most is for the NHL and NHLPA to implement effective service recovery strategies. From the results presented in these four studies we may be able to determine that these recovery strategies will need to be deemed positive for fans to regain high levels of satisfaction and intentions to resume consuming the NHL brand.

Sport Fans/Consumers

The interest in sport as a financially lucrative field continues to grow. Professional sport is the entertainment of choice for many. The attraction and financial impact of sport has become so prevalent that sport marketers have been researching the factors that attract sport consumers to these products (Funk & James, 2001, 2004; Kolbe & James, 2003; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). These marketers' careers are devoted to understanding the sport fan and increasing his/her sport consumption.

Previous literature has used the term sport consumer synonymously with sport spectator, follower, and fan (Boyd & Krehbiel, 1999; Funk & James, 2001, 2004; Kolbe, & James, 2000; Kolbe & James, 2003; Funk, Mahony & Havitz, 2003, Gladden & Funk, 2002; Stewart, Smith, & Nicholson, 2003; Wann et al., 1996). Recently Hyatt (2003) provided a more extensive definition of sport consumer: "sport consumers are people who direct their attention towards sport, be it an active participant, someone wearing

licensed merchandise of a major professional team, or anything in between” (p. 28). A consumer becomes a fan when they begin to show emotional attachment with that sport brand (Funk & James, 2001; Hyatt, 2003). These “fans” care about the brand and exhibit behaviours of consuming the brand that are expected to be exhibited by individuals who are emotionally devoted to something in their lives. A fan can become loyal to a sport, a team, a league, a player, and/or a coach (James, 2001; Robinson & Trail, 2005). For the purpose of this study, we will be concerned with loyal fans of the NHL and/or a team in the NHL.

The classification of sport consumers into distinct categories has been a continual process in fan loyalty research. One of the most notable models with this purpose in mind is the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) by Funk and James (2001). The PCM is composed of four stages describing an individual’s psychological connection to sport: awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance. The PCM provides us with a continuum that has a starting point and ends with allegiance (a loyal consumer) of a sport brand. Awareness depicts the point in time when an individual first learns that certain leagues, and/or teams exist, but does not have a favourite team. Attraction would indicate that an individual acknowledges having a favourite league or favourite team. Attachment occurs when a psychological connection is being created between the individual and the league or team. “Attachment represents the degree or strength of association based upon the perceived importance attached to physical and psychological features associated with a team or sport” (Funk & James, 2001, p. 121). The attachment to the NHL rather than the sport of hockey will be investigated for the purpose of this study. The reason for this is that the NHL is but one of many leagues playing the sport of hockey in the world.

There may be fans of the sport of hockey who are not fans of the NHL. Allegiance is the fourth and final step along the continuum. At this point, the consumer has become a loyal fan of the league or team. Allegiance is perceived to produce consistent and durable attitudes and behaviours.

The term “loyalty” will be used throughout this research, rather than “affiliation”, because the latter is not as extensively used in the literature. Throughout this study, the attachment and allegiance dimensions will be considered as one fluid level; that is, attachment and allegiance will not be treated as distinct stages but they will both fall under the dimension of loyalty. There is no clear point when the attachment stage ends and the consumer enters the allegiance stage. Funk and James (2001) report that both the attachment and the allegiance stages are based on intrinsic rather than extrinsic processes. We believe that consumers who choose to follow a team due to intrinsic processes are more apt to be stable in their behaviours and attitudes toward the product. Informants will be determined to be in the attachment and/or affiliation stage if they are able to express that they are emotionally invested in their favourite NHL team as well as exhibit statistical knowledge relating to that team’s history. Loyal consumers who fit in the attachment and/or affiliation stage regarding their psychological connection to the NHL and/or an NHL team will be retained to examine the impact of the lockout on their experience of being a loyal consumer of the NHL.

Becoming a Loyal Consumer

Researchers concerned with sport consumer loyalty have tended to focus on the factors that bind a consumer to a sport team as a continuing phenomenon (Kolbe & James, 2003; McDonald & Milne, 1997; Wakefield, 1995). According to the

Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2001), these initial attractions would be the ones that influenced the consumers to shift from the awareness stage to either the attachment and/or allegiance stage. Three studies in particular have dealt with the creation of a professional sport team fan (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996). These studies are summarized in the following pages.

Wann et al. (1996) conducted one of the earliest studies that examined the factors influencing the origination, continuation, and cessation of identification with a sport team. The author's exploratory study was filling a void in the sport management literature that "focused on the manner in which identification with a sports team influences the reactions of spectators" (Wann et al., 1996, p. 995). A survey was distributed to undergraduate students, asking them to list reasons why they had originally begun following their favourite sport team. This was coupled with statements about why they continue to follow their favourite team and why they no longer follow a favourite team they once followed, if this is the case. The top four reasons listed were: "My parents and/or family follow this team"; "the players, that is, because I like the players and/or because they are good"; "geographical reasons (like the town, city, or state this team represents and/or I live in or around the area)"; and "my friends and peers follow this team and I like the group affiliations and friendships I acquire" (Wann et al., 1996, p. 998).

James (2001) interviewed children to uncover the development of their loyalties to a sport, a team, and/or a player. James examined the process and capabilities of children in forming preferences for a favourite team and/or developing a psychological commitment to a sport, then to a team, then to a player that is resistant to change. Using

Piaget's theory of cognitive development, James hypothesized that children in the preoperational phase of development would be capable of forming preferences for a favourite team. However, they would lack the cognitive ability to show true loyalty to a team, but that older children in the concrete operational phase of development would have the cognitive complexity to allow them to be truly loyal. James utilized a qualitative methodology (i.e., a "clinical observation technique" [James, 2001, p. 238] protocol) to interview 50 children in total. The 50 children were composed of 25 aged 5 to 6 (predominantly preoperational) and 25 aged 8 to 9 (predominantly concrete operational). The data collected provided James with evidence to support his hypotheses.

With regards to how the children developed loyalties to these sports, teams, and/or players specifically, James reported family (fathers, mothers, and siblings) and friends as being the most important socializing agents early in life. It was found that among the children who reported having a favourite team, "50% had the same as their father, 31% had the same favourite team as a sibling (primarily an older brother), 12% had the same favourite team as their mother, and 8% had the same favourite team as a friend" (James, 2001, p. 252). Fathers were found to have exerted a primary influence on the children's development of an attraction and eventual loyalty to a particular team. "Children were more likely to know their father's favourite team compared with knowing other family members' and friends' favourite teams, and children talked about and watched a favourite team on television with their fathers" (James, 2001, p. 257).

The findings suggested that if the fathers had a favourite sport they tended to introduce their children to the sport. As well, if the fathers had a favourite team, the

children would have increased exposure to that team. This was particularly evident as it pertained to attending games (exhibited behaviour).

Only 1 child talked about going to games with a brother, and the remaining children who had attended a game all talked about going with their fathers. It could be argued that a father might take a child to a game because he thinks the child would enjoy the outing and to spend time with the child. Considering the cost of attending college and professional sporting events, it is more likely that a father attends a game with a child because both share a common interest in the team, or a father has an interest in a team that he wants to share with his child (James, 2001, p. 254).

These findings were echoed as it pertained to watching a favourite team on television. “Seventy-six percent of the children who watched their favourite team on television said that they watched either ‘with my Dad’ or ‘when my Dad watches a game’” (James, 2001, p. 254). Television was found to provide children with opportunities to watch a team. It therefore played an important role by reinforcing a child’s attachment to a specific team. A father’s influence may be reinforced by their child’s ability to watch the specific team on television with or without the father present. The exhibited behaviour of watching their favourite team on television allowed the children to progress to a level of true loyalty towards the specific team.

The third investigation that reported on the influences that shape the creation of a team fan, was a study conducted by Kolbe and James (2000). Since most of the fan base research had been focused on the maintenance of fans, Kolbe and James (2000) decided to focus on the factors for creating, building, and maintaining a base of loyal fans. They

distributed surveys, consisting of open-ended and scaled questions to “long-term” NFL season ticket holders of the Cleveland Browns. The questions were designed to explore and identify what influenced these people to become Browns’s fans and when in their life span these individuals had become fans of the Browns.

Kolbe and James’s (2000) results provided support for the importance of fathers as being the catalysts in shaping team preferences, particularly important for youths. Fathers were represented as the overwhelmingly most influential person as it pertained to creating identification with a team. They were listed as having the greatest impact on the individual becoming a Browns’s fan by nearly 40% of the respondents. The findings that were different from previous work had to do with individuals who became fans during later stages in their life, not as children. Influences shifted from the primary catalyst being the father to the team, “Players and coaches of the team were important influences for those who became fans as adolescents or adults” (Kolbe & James, 2000, p. 23). It is important to note that over a third of the respondents reported becoming a fan of the Browns before the age of ten (while a majority of the respondents stated that it was by the time they were 15 years old) (Kolbe & James, 2000). From the scaled items that dealt with influences such as community issues, attendance and atmosphere, tradition of the team, team experience with family, and non-game activities, the two influences that had the strongest ratings were “growing up in Cleveland” and “the Browns as my hometown team”.

These findings did not contradict any of the previous findings in the literature. James (2001) found that children were able to construct identification to teams prior to the age of ten, and fathers were the most influential socializing agent to children forming

these identifications. Wann et al. (1996) found that parents or family were influential in the identification process, as were geographical reasons. Geographical reasons encompass “growing up in Cleveland” and “The Browns as a Cleveland institution”. The Browns and Cleveland may have become interchangeable to these fans. When they speak of Cleveland or their home town they may automatically begin talking about their Browns. These fans may also wear the merchandise, which increases the visibility of the logo and the association of Clevelanders or surrounding area residents as Browns’s fans. These Browns’s fans may then view themselves as a group. Wann et al. (1996) reported the importance of friends or peers following the team and the individuals enjoying the group affiliations resulting from following the team and geographical reasons.

A brief summary of the literature that has dealt with sport consumers’ initial identification or the creation of their attachment to a sport team has provided researchers with several potential catalysts for individuals transitioning from non-fans to fans; influence of family members (especially fathers), friends, and/or peers, and geographical reasons. The existing literature also provides support for the notion that it is common for children (prior to the age of ten) to develop loyalties to teams. The three studies (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996) claim their findings to be generalizable to all fans. However as noted by Hyatt (2003) the method employed by the researchers to collect their data may represent bias. Wann et al. (1996) surveyed undergraduate students from a university in Western Kentucky. James (2001) examined children from an elementary school in a city located in the Midwest. Kolbe and James (2000) examined fans of the Cleveland Browns. While each of the studies was presented as representative

of the development of fandom, each of the investigations was comprised of participants who were isolated to one geographical location each.

Wann et al. (1996) surveyed students' loyalty to either professional or amateur teams. In the initial instructions, the students were asked to list their favourite sport team and answer the questions with that team in mind. Teams within a specific league share many similarities. However, it could be argued that these teams have just as many differences pertaining to the environment that surrounds them. The differences are experienced by the fans of these particular teams. Now, if fans of teams within a specific league experience such great differences in their fandom, how can one predict that characteristics are generalizable to all fans across sports?

James and Ross (2002) conducted a study of minor and major league baseball fans' motives for consuming the two brands. The results suggested that younger and single consumers are more attracted to minor league games. The minor league consumers were motivated by desire for entertainment and the opportunity that the brand offers them to spend time with friends. Whereas the MLB consumers were influenced to a greater extent by team-related experiences, appreciation for the players' high level of skill, and the drama of games (James & Ross, 2002). With the participants in Wann et al.'s (1996) study being undergraduate students, it could be presumed from the findings of James and Ross (2002) that these participants were thinking of amateur and/or minor league brands, because they would be younger consumers. The ticket prices, atmosphere at the stadium/arena, and advertising around the brand are a few characteristics that separate amateur/minor league and professional sport brands, and the experiences shared by their fans.

The questions asked in James's (2001) study in a small Midwestern city were concerning children's favourite sport teams. James's research instrument did not differentiate these teams between professional and amateur. The Midwest region of the United States is saturated with successful college sport teams. The associations to these college teams often times hold greater meanings to the followers than do attachments to the professional teams. As Hyatt (2003) noted, it would not be uncommon to find loyalties to these college teams passed down from generations.

Kolbe and James (2000) conducted a study of Cleveland Browns season ticket holders who had held season tickets prior to the teams' move from Cleveland to Baltimore in 1996. Shortly after the move to Baltimore, the NFL granted Cleveland an expansion team that would commence play in 1999 under the same name, logo, and colours of the previous Browns's team. The fans who were surveyed in the study were those who had purchased personal seat licenses (PSLs), meaning that they had bought the rights to the season tickets upon the return of the Browns to Cleveland. With the Browns being a team with a rich history in the NFL, it may stand to reason that, "Browns's fans would have had ample opportunity to pass their team loyalty to younger generations over the years" (Hyatt, 2003, p. 45).

The NHL has a relatively rich history in Canada and the Northern regions of the United States, especially in the original six cities (Toronto, Detroit, Montréal, New York, Boston, and Chicago). However, with the recent expansion of the NHL to Southern United States cities in the past 15 years, there may not have been ample opportunity for fans to pass their loyalty on through generations. The teams represented in the three previous studies (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996) may be ones

with rich history versus relatively new franchises. Therefore, for the fans of the newer NHL franchises their reasons for initial identification may be different than those presented in the three previous studies that dealt with brands that may have been prominent in the lives of family members for several generations.

Small vs. Large Market

As previously stated, brand loyalty requires a consumer to exemplify both behavioural (the act of consuming the brand) and attitudinal (an emotional attachment felt for the brand) loyalty, which then classifies these individuals in either attachment and/or allegiances dimensions according to Funk and James's (2001) PCM. In 2001, Chaudhuri and Holbrook conducted an examination of brand loyalty, purchase loyalty, and attitudinal loyalty. From their data emerged many relationships that dealt with strong and weak market brands (which I will use synonymously with large market and small market), as well as the term relative price. The authors stated that consumers who are loyal to a brand may be willing to pay more for the brand because they perceive some unique value in the brand. They term this relative price, because as the perceived value of a brand increases, the consumer will be more apt to pay a higher price for the brand than will a consumer who has a lower perceived value of the brand.

The Detroit Red Wings and the Toronto Maple Leafs of the NHL provide examples of large market teams that garner a higher relative price. Both of these franchises sell-out all of their 41 home games per season (Detroit Red Wings, 2004; Toronto Maple Leafs, 2004). In 2003-2004 Red Wings's fans would spend an average of \$57.11 (U.S. dollars) for a ticket to a home game and Maple Leafs's fans would spend an average of \$57 (U.S. dollars) per ticket (Bannister, 2004). Bannister (2004) reported that

the average NHL ticket cost \$44 (U.S. dollars), therefore the consumers of these two teams paid roughly \$13 dollars more than the average NHL consumer to attend a home game. If you were to compare these prices to those of the Buffalo Sabres and the Florida Panthers, two small market teams, whose average ticket price were \$36 (U.S. dollars) and \$30 (U.S. dollars) were only able to sell-out less than half of their 41 home games (Bannister, 2005). This would provide evidence for the notion that strong market brands being associated with higher relative prices (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) claimed that weak market brands are at a disadvantage with stronger market brands for two reasons. The first is that the weak market has fewer buyers than does the strong market and the second is that the weak market brand is purchased less frequently by these few buyers. As previously exemplified, the Edmonton Oilers are a franchise that has recently suffered from a relatively smaller NHL market (Jones, 2005). The Oilers were forced to draw from a substantially less populated area than some of their NHL counterparts. For the present investigation, the first reason stated by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) is viewed to be valid, however the second reason may not pertain to sport brands. A season ticket holder of an NHL team buys 41 game tickets whether they be consumers of the Toronto Maple Leafs or the Buffalo Sabres.

The authors stated that greater attitudinal loyalty should lead to greater willingness to sacrifice by paying a premium price for a valued brand. They coupled those findings with the fact that strong markets were found to elicit greater levels of repeat purchases among their consumers (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). This leads to the statement that purchase loyalty leads to greater market share and attitudinal loyalty

leads to a higher relative price for the brand. This explains why large market franchises in the NHL such as the Detroit Red Wings and Toronto Maple Leafs are able to charge higher prices for tickets to their home games, because they have a large consumer base to draw from and these consumers tend to have high attitudinal loyalties to their brand. Therefore they are willing to pay a higher relative price to attend the home games played by these two franchises. Findings by Baldinger and Robinson (1996) provided more support for the notion that weak market brands are at a disadvantage to strong market brands. In their study, strong market brands were able to retain highly loyal consumers better than weak markets were.

Labour Disputes in Professional Sport

As salaries of professional athletes have risen over the past quarter century, so have the number of labour disputes that have halted play in the four major professional sport leagues in North America. As reported by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (2005), Major League Baseball has suffered two major work stoppages (1981 and 1994); the latter resulted in the loss of the playoffs and perhaps the downfall of the Montreal Expos, the first place team at the time of the strike. The Expos were never again able to reach the level of on-field performance as they had achieved in 1994. At the end of the 2004 MLB season, it was announced that the Expos were being relocated to Washington D.C.

The National Football League has suffered two work stoppages caused by labour disputes (1982, 1987). Troy Vincent, the President of the NFLPA was quoted as saying that the NFL is arguably the most successful of the four major sport leagues in North America, and this stems from a shared revenue system that works (NHL, 2005). The

National Basketball Association's owners locked players and fans out in 1998. When the contract that currently governs the NBA was introduced, the NBA welcomed players and fans back to the arenas. The National Hockey League suffered a 10-day player walk out in 1992, followed by a strike in 1994 that resulted in the loss of half of the 1994-1995 season. Then in 2004-2005 the NHL season was cancelled following a lockout. The impact of the lockout will be the focus of my study.

A 1995 investigation of professional baseball by Wakefield used a field study approach to examine the effects of team identification, social influence, and perceived ticket value on spectators' intentions to attend future games. This study took on greater importance as it took place after the MLB and NHL strikes of 1994 extending to 1995. Many of the findings reported by the researcher indicated that the participants were influenced by the two work stoppages. The sporting atmosphere at the time of Wakefield's 1995 study was governed by work stoppages, thus providing Wakefield with unusual circumstances in the sporting industry. Fans were forced to experience being fans when there were no MLB or NHL games being played.

Wakefield (1995) stated "ownership management and player unions are concerned that such strikes may hurt future patronage because of deflated fan support" (p. 336). Wakefield suggests that work stoppages may negatively affect a social groups' acceptance of supporting the team. A social group was defined as a group with which the individuals associate themselves and with which they consume the sport. Wakefield (1995) stated that in 1994 the NHL may have lost an opportunity to gain social popularity with its expanded television coverage, particularly in the absence of the MLB playoffs, however the NHL had its own work stoppage during the same months. He continued by

suggesting that the work stoppage “may have hindered the expansion of hockey’s popularity, as potential spectators became more involved in other forms of spectating or recreation” (Wakefield, 1995, p. 348).

From his investigation, Wakefield (1995) concluded that management needed to either decrease ticket prices or increase the fans’ perceived entertainment value at the same ticket price to increase attendance. It was also noted that actions that reduce the team and league’s social approval in the eyes of the community (such as players participating in strikes for more money than most people could imagine making in a year) could have a direct effect on a consumer’s loyalty to the team and subsequent future patronage. Management must be concerned with the negative impacts of these work stoppages on the attitudes and behaviours of their consumers upon the return of play.

Four years after the publication of Wakefield’s (1995) article, Boyd and Krehbiel (1999) published the results of their investigation into the effect of the timing of promotions on the attendance of six MLB teams over four years. The authors dealt briefly with the impact of the 1994 strike on the attendance of these teams and the effect of promotions on the attendance of these teams after the strike. Boyd and Krehbiel suggested that professional sport work stoppages have negative impacts on fans’ attitudes and behaviours towards the team because work stoppages increase public alienation due to perceptions that both players and owners are greedy. This investigation provided evidence that the effect of promotions were greater prior to the 1994 MLB strike than they were after the strike. Boyd and Krehbiel (1999) suggested that after a work stoppage ...teams need to seek long-term solutions to the public relations damage...rather than using tactical action, such as promotions, teams must reestablish fan

involvement through closer management and player ties to the community.

Although promotions may help reestablish fan involvement, they are clearly less effective than they were prior to the strike (p. 30).

Through the evidence presented in this investigation it appears that reducing the damage caused by the lockout will not be as simple as providing promotions and giveaways to fans. As Boyd and Krehbiel (1999) explained sport managers may be required to perform damage control or even more to regain a fan's loyalty.

1994-1995 MLB Player Strike

As reported by Edge (2004) professional baseball has the longest history of any of the four major professional sport leagues in North America, as well as the earliest reported labour dispute in North American professional sport. In 1890, the Brotherhood of Professional Baseball Players went on strike over a dispute regarding their desire for free agency. At the time, owners reserved the rights to the players, and the players had no right to negotiate contracts with other franchises. The only way that players could change franchises was by the owners trading or selling the players to another franchise. The Brotherhood of Professional Baseball Players eventually started their own league with 200 of their members, but the league did not last long. It soon merged with the National Baseball League (a league within the MLB umbrella) and the players were once again under the regulations of MLB owners.

In 1952, the Major League Players' Association (MLPA) that currently represents the MLB players was formed. The MLPA have been the pioneers in professional sport as it pertains to fighting for the rights of their players. MLB has experienced numerous labour disputes, where the MLPA argued with MLB owners for equal partnerships in

their brand of professional baseball. Prior to the 2004-2005 NHL lockout, the MLB player strike of 1994-95 was the longest shutdown of a North American professional sport league (Edge, 2004). MLB did not experience the longest shutdown in terms of games lost, because their strike began shortly before the playoffs were to begin in 1994 and lasted two weeks into the beginning of the 2005 season. However, in terms of days that the strike was ongoing, this was the longest that the North American professional sport industry had experienced.

The cause of the 1994-1995 MLB player strike is eerily familiar for fans of the NHL. It stemmed from the demand of the MLB owners to implement a salary cap to halt the escalating salaries that players were being awarded (Mellor, Paley, & Holzworth, 1999). At the time of the strike, the Montreal Expos (a relatively small market team as compared to their competitors such as the Atlanta Braves, New York Yankees, and Toronto Blue Jays) were poised to win their division and make a run at the World Series. However, the strike in the fall of 1994 put an end to the dream of many Expos's fans. The downfall of the team subsequently occurred and in the summer of 2005 when the Expos were relocated to Washington D.C. and became the Washington Nationals. The Expos franchise was never able to recover the hype that had been generated by their success in the summer of 1994 (Daily News, 2004).

In 1999, Mellor, Paley, and Holzworth published a study entitled "Fans' Judgments About the 1994-95 Major League Baseball Players' Strike" that would help to understand the fans' perceptions about professional sport work stoppages. The authors were interested in the reactions of fans to the strike tactics used during the strike. The strike tactics related to the amount of support the fans' felt for a professional

entertainment workers' strike, in particular those that were used by both parties (MLB and MLPA) in 1994-95. The authors surveyed 119 participants who expressed high consumership of Major League Baseball regarding three tactics used throughout the strike. The tactics were: (a) upon the return of MLB, discounted tickets offered by franchise owners; (b) the use of replacement players by MLB franchises; (c) striking players forming picket lines near game sites.

The results of the Mellor, Paley, and Holzworth (1999) study showed that when the owners increased the discounts offered to fans on tickets, the fans showed less support for the players' strike. However, when the owners decided to implement replacement players to start the 1995 season, instead of waiting for the resolution of the strike, fans showed more support for the striking players. As for the presence of players picketing near game sites, there were no significant results found to affect fans' judgments. A secondary finding was that fans with greater support of unions in general tended to indicate more support for the strike. Thus, ticket discounts had less influence on fans with high consumership and greater support of unions in general. This may be of particular interest to marketers of NHL franchises that are located in high industrial areas with a large number of their fans belonging to, and supporting, unions. Reduced ticket prices may not be the most effective strategy in a market such as Detroit. The Detroit Red Wing marketers may have to find more creative ways of promoting their brand, rather than simply offering discounted ticket prices.

For several years following the strike, Major League Baseball suffered negative financial impacts (Gatto, 2004). Gatto furthered the statement by suggesting that the home run race between Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire saved baseball, but would not

have been needed had the strike not occurred. The Sosa and McGwire race brought fans back to the ballparks in 1998. Up until the 1998 season, fans had not returned to the ballparks with the same record breaking attendance numbers that were evident in the 1993 season, prior to the strike (Gatto, 2004). This was an outcome of the alienation that fans had felt from both the owners and the players during the 1994-1995 strike (Deacon, 2004). The NHL may need to consider the MLB strike of 1994-1995 to lessen the negative impacts from their 2004-2005 lockout

Reactions to Labour Disputes in Professional Sports

At the conclusion of the NHL work stoppage in 1994-1995, Wayne Gretzky, was quoted as saying “It’s really hard for the average person in North America to understand why athletes complain and bicker over the kind of money they are making...consequently, the image of our sport is probably going to suffer for a while” (Deacon & Hawaleshka, 1995, p. 43). Ten years later, the experts once again look to Gretzky to share his opinion regarding the effects of the current lockout. In July 2005, Gretzky stated...

At the end of the day everybody lost...We almost crippled our industry. It was very disappointing what happened. We disappointed a lot of people and I don’t just mean the average fan. I’m talking about TV partnerships, corporate partnerships, the fan, the guy who goes to one or two games a year with his son. We’ve got a lot of work ahead of us. It’s not going to all change and be all nice overnight” (TSN, 2005).

The statements provided by Gretzky have been separated by ten years and two NHL labour disputes, yet seem to be very similar in nature. Following the 1994-1995

NHL work stoppage Gary Bettman (NHL Commissioner) provided an ironic look into a future. In 1995 Bettman argued, "If all 26 owners had said that they had to have a tax or a cap, we could have pursued them, but in my judgment it would have cost the entire season...Many people, including me, thought that if there was a way to preserve the season, then that should be done" (Deacon & Hawaleshka, 1995). Bettman did not feel that losing an entire season would be beneficial to the NHL over the long term. Today, it could be presumed that if asked the same question that Bettman would state that losing an entire season was necessary to achieve a CBA that included a salary cap. Where would the NHL be today had the owners held out for the salary cap in the 1994-1995 negotiations?

The financial state of the NHL is perhaps the single most important issue that concerns the owners. History points to the fact that fans are a forgiving bunch. Following the 1994-1995 NHL work stoppage, the fans welcomed back the Saturday night program that is a Canadian cultural classic, CBC's Hockey Night in Canada with open arms (Deacon & Hawaleshka, 1995). White, a sports sociologist who was interviewed by Corelli and Came (1996), explained fans' forgiving nature following the work stoppage of 1994-1995, "Fans remain fans in spite of everything primarily because sport is still romanticized and marketed in that way...Pro franchises capitalize pretty much on our need to identify with our local community and therefore to be connected to that team" (Corelli & Came, 1996, p. 55). History tends to show that fans will return eventually. A poll that was conducted during the 1995 MLB and NHL seasons, the first season for both leagues following a work stoppage, showed that 32 per cent of the participants claimed to be watching less baseball as compared to prior to the strike. While 26 per cent of the

participants watched less NHL in its first season after the work stoppage (Corelli & Came, 1996). It did take MLB years to recover from the strike and less time for the NHL.

Corelli and Came (1996) described the story of two fans, a mother and her 27-year old daughter who were at a sports bar in Vancouver and complaining that large salaries had made hockey players spoiled and lazy. However, later in that very same evening, the authors noted that the mother and daughter were part of a crowd cheering the Vancouver Canucks on the 15 television sets located in the bar. It is clear that simply because fans complain about the labour issues surrounding their favourite teams it does not mean that they are not going to watch professional sport following work stoppages. The present research attempts to investigate this issue by asking the informants after the NHL has returned to confirm if their predicted consumption practices were a reality or simply false predictions (Cunningham & Kwon, 2003). Cunningham and Kwon (2003) utilized the theory of planned behaviour to examine university students' intentions to attend a hockey game. They found that predicted behaviours were significantly related to actual consumption practices. Therefore we will examine participants' predicted consumption behaviours they would exhibit once the NHL returned to action, while comparing those predicted behaviours with actual consumption behaviours they have exhibited upon the league's return.

Summary of Labour Disputes in Professional Sports

Labour disputes have become common practice in professional sport over the past several decades, coinciding with the emergence of associations acting as unions representing the athletes who participate in these leagues. The major issue that plagues

the owners and the athletes who find themselves on opposite sides of the labour dispute is over money, and who deserves what portion of the revenues generated from selling their product to the fans. As illustrated by both Wakefield (1995), and Boyd and Krehbiel (1999) labour disputes have historically resulted in negative effects on the consumption practices of their fans upon the leagues' return to play. However, the present situation may prove to yield different results. As mentioned by Brownlee (2005), no one is mentioning the term small market team anymore. Meaning that the NHL has created a financial system that allows every team to compete in signing big name players, such as the Calgary Flames signing Tony Amonte and the Edmonton Oilers signing Chris Pronger (Brownlee, 2005). The previous CBA made it difficult for the teams with less money to sign these high profile players. These outcomes of the new CBA may cause fans to have different reactions to the return of the NHL in the 2005-2006 season as opposed to their reactions from previous labour disputes. The present study will allow researchers to determine whether the 2004-2005 NHL lockout has had the same negative effects as previous labour disputes on the consumption practices of some NHL fans.

Summary of Review of Literature

Studies that dealt with the first dimension under study have shown that becoming a fan of a team/league is influenced by family (especially father), geographic location, and peer groups and associations. Previous studies have also been done in the past to examine the financial impacts and consumption practice changes due to labour disputes in professional sport. This study is unique to loyal fans of the NHL - the league that has the unfortunate privilege of being the only professional sport league in North America to have cancelled an entire season due to a labour dispute

The present study has examined how fans who have been left to focus their love of the NHL elsewhere (or not) have reacted. These individuals have been presented with a dilemma. They may have been forced to alter their lives, because their normal fall, winter, and spring consumption practices were altered without the NHL. There are striking similarities to other major professional sport leagues that have experienced loss of games due to labour disputes. Fans of these leagues were also forced to make alterations in their consumption practices, but not all of these leagues have been impacted in an identical fashion. Therefore the review of literature provides a background into service failure/recovery, fan loyalty, labour disputes in sport, and professional sport in particular.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The Interpretive Paradigm

A majority of the academic work in the fan loyalty literature has been based on the traditional positivist methods, such as surveys and questionnaires (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kolbe & James, 2000; 2003; Wakefield, 1995, Wann et al., 1996). Researchers have created surveys and questionnaires to uncover individuals' reasons for following sport teams based on previous findings. In contrast to positivists' methods, the active construction and interpretation of people's worlds is the focus of interpretive researchers (Hyatt, 2003). Rather than "framing actions as discrete variables, interpretive researchers conceptualize actions as being relative to their contexts" (Hyatt, 2003, p. 69).

Design of the Study

This phenomenon under study is unique in nature. It is an examination of fandom when the fans' teams are not competing due to a work stoppage. The study is situated within the interpretive paradigm, and seeks an understanding of being NHL fans prior to, during, and after the lockout of 2004-2005 from the fans' point of view. Interpretive methods have been used because as Hyatt (2003) states, "they enable fans to tell their stories from the insiders' perspective, and also because such methods have the potential to reveal subtleties and nuances that traditional positivist methods may not uncover" (p.4). Interpretive studies tend to involve smaller numbers of participants than do positivist studies. Yet the amount of data gathered can be relatively large as compared to positivistic studies. Interpretive studies involve many hours of participant interviews,

they may also include observations and document analyses, and this data could be retrieved from multiple sources (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002).

Interpretive methods allow researchers to uncover what a story reveals about the person and world from which the story came (Patton, 2002). Fossey et al. (2002) explain that interpretive research “places emphasis on seeking understanding of the meanings of human actions and experiences, and on generating accounts of their meaning from the viewpoints of those involved” (p. 718). Actions exhibited by fans have meaning behind them. The interpretive methodology will allow researchers to ask the informants what are the meanings behind these actions. Drawn from this explanation, it may be concluded that being a fan of the NHL who must go through a lockout that has resulted in the loss of an entire season is a unique situation. These fans do share certain similarities with fans of other sports, however NHL fans can also be thought of as unique, sharing the experiences of being NHL fans with and only with other NHL fans. It is not simply that they are fans of a professional sport league or fans of hockey, but that they are fans of the NHL who all shared the experience of being fans during a season in which the NHL shut down its operations.

The interpretive paradigm allows researchers to explain a phenomenon that has occurred in the person’s life and how this particular phenomenon has impacted that person’s life, if it has at all. The phenomenon is seen as processes of being a fan (Hyatt, 2003). For the purpose of the present study, the phenomenon that will be researched is the cancellation of the 2004-2005 NHL season. An investigation into the effect of the particular phenomenon on the lives of loyal NHL fans will be undertaken to explain the short-term effects of the work stoppage on the fans of the NHL. The investigation will

delve into the dimensions of being a fan of the NHL. These dimensions are four-part (becoming a fan, being a fan prior to the lockout, living life during the lockout including their perceived relationship to the NHL after the lockout, and their actual relationship to the NHL after the lockout). The becoming a fan dimension was included in an examination of the 2004-2005 lockout, because fans' reactions to the lockout could possibly be traced back to how they originally became a fan.

Hyatt (2003) states that, "being a fan is about more than just doing things." (p. 70). Being a fan involves more than just actions. It involves emotion that is felt towards the league/team. Thus the current research has followed a similar structure to that of Hyatt (2003), using a face-to-face interview methodology to examine the phenomena. Within the context of the process of being a fan of the NHL during the lockout of 2004-2005, each person will have reasons for doing what they did as fans. As such, this study must give voice to the insiders who are the experts on the phenomenon of being NHL fans during the 2004-2005 lockout.

Patton (2002) explained that interpretive research methods may include "in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs, and creative nonfiction" (p. 155) to depict and understand one's lived experience and perceptions of experience. Loyal NHL fans will be sought to investigate their lived experience of the phenomenon of the cancelled 2004-2005 NHL season. To provide the richest information possible, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with loyal NHL fans. Questions were formed to seek narratives concerning the history of the individuals' experiences with the NHL, from when they first became aware of the league, shared experiences amongst the informants while being fans, narratives regarding their life without the NHL

during the 2004-2005 lockout including their predicted emotions and behaviours upon the return of the NHL, and finally a self-report of their actual emotions and behaviours upon the return of the NHL.

The Fans

Sixteen fans of NHL teams were interviewed. A seventeenth individual was scheduled to be interviewed in the study, however in short conversation with the individual it was realized that he did not display the desired emotional and behavioural attachment to their favourite team, as was needed to participate in the study. It is difficult to set a definitive number of participants to take part in an interpretive study, because it is not possible to predict beforehand when the researcher will have collected enough information. The data collection process is considered complete in interpretive research when there is no longer any new information revealed from subsequent interviews (Patton, 2002). It was apparent upon completion of the sixteenth interview that the information was becoming saturated. Informants were no longer revealing any new information. The authenticity of qualitative research increases as it becomes evident that the researcher has learned from his/her encounters with the informants (Fossey et al., 2002). The number of fans who were interviewed was determined when the subject became saturated, meaning that the new informants were no longer revealing any new information. Each fan was interviewed once. The interview with each participant took place upon the return of the NHL.

The interview focused on the history of the individuals' becoming fans of the NHL, their experience of being fans of the NHL prior to the lockout, their experience of being a fan of the NHL during its lockout season of 2004-2005 including how they had

predicted to react to the NHL once the league returned to competition. Cunningham and Kwon (2003) conducted a study of participants' intentions to attend a college hockey game at a Midwestern university in the United States. They found that there is a positive relationship between intentions to attend a hockey game and previous behaviours, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Relating to the present study, it was asked if the fans believe that they have/will return to consumption practices of NHL games just as they had prior to the lockout, to a lesser extent, or to a greater level?

The present study went beyond intentions to attend a game by confirming if the intentions led to actual behaviour. The interviews thus served to verify the actual emotions and actions that had been exhibited by the interviewed fans after the NHL returned to competition.

It was required that all the informants in this study be fans of the NHL. The fans needed to show adequate levels of fan loyalty as to classify them in either the attachment and/or affiliation stage of the PCM (Funk & James, 2001). There are individuals who call themselves fans. However, when they are asked to give examples of their fandom they may express either emotional attachment or give behavioural examples, but cannot provide adequate examples of both emotional and behavioural attachment as to be classified in either of the two PCM stages used in the present study. This was evidenced by participant 17 who was deemed to not qualify for the study. He met the level of behavioural attachment to his favourite team, as he watched a majority of the games that they played. However, when asked if he was emotionally affected when the won or lost, he said that it wouldn't affect him either way.

There are no scales used in this study to quantify the fans' level of identification. This is an interpretive study, therefore the informants were asked to describe their relationship to the NHL as they feel it. Therefore the individual's experiences as a fan are seen as individualistic, there is no set criteria such as must attend 10 games or watch 10 games on television per season. However, the informants were required to possess adequate emotional attachment to an NHL team that would classify them in either the attachment and/or affiliation stages of the PCM (Funk & James, 2001). If the interviews revealed that the individual did not have an emotional attachment or demonstrate any form of consumption practices toward the league in any way, then the person was not included in this study, as was found with participant 17.

To uncover richer findings from this study, a search was conducted for fans in the South and South Western Ontario areas. Both male and female fans, fans of different ages, fans from different socio-economic status and backgrounds, and those who had different behavioural involvement in the NHL (season ticket holders, single ticket subscribers, television viewers...) were recruited for the study. Gender was not controlled in the present study. Robinson and Trail (2005) found that gender explained only 2% of the variance in motives and only 3% of the variance in points of attachment related to being a spectator at a sporting event. Thus, they found that men and women essentially shared the same motives and points of attachment for consuming a sporting event. A brief demographic summary (see Appendix A) was filled out by participants prior to the interview to aid the researcher in guiding the interviews.

Finding the Fans

Throughout the process of conducting this study, discussions of this study and presentations have taken place on and off campus of Brock University. With Brock University being located in Southern Ontario with three NHL teams (Toronto, Buffalo, and Detroit) being accessible to residents of the area, the densely populated area provided for a great number fans to choose from ensuring that an adequate variety of fans were represented in the study. Due to the large contingent of NHL fans in the South and South Western Ontario regions, many people have become interested in participating in the study after attending presentations of my research plans and from word of mouth. All interested individuals were asked to submit their names and contact information. They were informed that they would be contacted in the future following Brock University's ethics approval.

To supplement the word of mouth recruitment techniques, posters were distributed to community hockey rinks in several cities in the Southern and South Western Ontario regions. The posters included a brief explanation of the aims of the study and contact information for the potential participants to speak with the researcher and arrange an interview. The posters called for fans of the NHL who are 18 years old and over and wish to discuss the impact that the 2004-2005 lockout has had on their experiences of being a fan. Although NHL fans can be younger than 18, I chose to select adults for this research because of their ability to clearly convey their experiences.

Upon completion of the interviews several informants were asked to provide referrals for anyone who they felt would like to participate in the study. The referred informants were then contacted to determine if they would be interested in being

interviewed regarding the impact of the NHL lockout on their life as a loyal fan of a team in the NHL. If the referred informants conveyed an interest and shared emotional investments in a team in the NHL then a time was agreed upon to perform the interview.

The Questions

The interpretive nature of this study called for open-ended discussions between the informants and the investigator. As such, there was not a definite interview structure used throughout the interview processes. There was a set of questions that were used to address the four dimensions under study (becoming a fan, being a fan prior to the lockout, being a fan during the lockout including the fans' perceived relationship with the NHL upon the completion of the lockout, and the fans' actual relationship after the lockout). These dimensions became semi-structured in nature, as there was an outline of topics that needed to be covered, however the informants were free to take the conversations in new directions as is a tenet of interpretive research (Patton, 2002). The guide simply acted as a method to ensure that all four dimensions were covered in each of the interviews. The following questions were used to ensure that all four dimensions as well as the issue of small and large market teams were covered throughout the interviews:

- How did you originally become a fan of a team in the NHL?
- Could you share a story of an event that has taken place in your life involving the NHL?
- What was it like being a fan of the NHL prior to the lockout?
- Could you describe your favourite team?
- Tell me your feelings concerning the lockout?

- Did you feel that your favourite team's status has influenced your feelings concerning the lockout?
- How did your life change with the absence of the NHL?
 - Did you continue to consume hockey?
- How did you anticipate reacting to the return of the NHL?
 - Do you watch it as frequently? Please explain.
 - Do you feel as attached to the league? Please explain.
- How have you reacted to the return of the NHL?

The Interview

Each interview lasted between 18 and 46 minutes with the average being 26 minutes. Each informant was given the interview package (see Appendix A), which consisted of the recruitment poster, the demographic survey, and a question template. Each signed a participation form of consent. All of the interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon location. Eight of the interviews took place at the informants' homes, three at my home, two at my office located at my workplace, one at the informant's place of business, and two at a local diner where I interviewed two brothers (both loyal fans of a team in the NHL) who took turns answering questions at separate times during the interview. All of these interviews were transcribed verbatim, resulting in 94 single spaced pages of information that was used for analysis.

Data Analysis

Each interview was tape recorded to aid in the transcribing process of the interviews. The tapes were replayed allowing the researcher to transfer the dialogue from the interviews to word documents. Once the interviews were completely transcribed, they

were e-mailed to the informants for them to review the transcriptions and confirm that the conversations were captured accurately.

Once the transcriptions were returned from the informants they were inputted into the qualitative software Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti was used in the present study for the purpose of coding the interviews (the data). This software provided tools enabling the researcher to extract and organize themes and categories from the transcribed interviews (Babiak, 2003). The software allowed the researcher to create categories in which sentences/codes of dialogue the informants have provided could be placed. As a researcher discovers other sentences/codes that could also fit a similar description he/she can assign the sentences/codes to the category that has already been created. If the sentence/code does not match the criteria for any of the existing categories that the researcher has created, he/she may then create a new category.

The development of categories allows the researcher to uncover themes among the interviews and/or informants. An example of theme development using the Atlas.ti software for the present study would be the uncovering of the theme “A father’s influence” which stemmed from the combination of categories: watching hockey on television with my father, attending hockey games with my father, and my father’s favourite team.

Atlas.ti allows researchers to extract sentences/codes shared by informants in the interview process that reflect similar experiences. If a researcher discovers that similar experiences are being shared by a number of informants, and these experiences fit into the same category for a number of informants, the researcher may decide that this category is in reality a theme for their particular research project. Atlas.ti allows

researchers to compare similar experiences as shared by a number of informants, by illustrating data and allowing the researcher to manipulate it with the aid of the software.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to ensure the validity of the interpretive analyses of the fans' experiences throughout the lockout. The strategies that were used include the screening process of the fans, member checking, and consultations with experts.

Screening

Prior to performing an interview fans were required to demonstrate adequate levels of emotional and behavioural attachment to their favourite team to fit within the attachment and/or affiliation stage of the PCM (Funk & James, 2001). The interpretive paradigm allows for the fans to demonstrate their individual levels of emotional and behavioural attachment as they choose to experience it. There were no set determinants for how a fan must consume their favourite team, but they needed to demonstrate that they did consume at a loyal level, as well as express emotional attachment to the team.

Member Checking

All 16 of the transcripts were sent to the fans that participated in the study to overview to ensure accuracy. The fans were asked to make changes where they saw necessary, and were allowed to make additions if they thought of anything new since the interview, or felt that the addition was needed. Eleven of the transcripts were returned, and there were not any changes indicated.

Expert Consultation

The researcher met regularly with a committee of professors who each provided expertise in the area. Progress reports were delivered throughout the research process.

The committee members provided feedback on the progress, and oversaw the entire investigation.

CHAPTER 5

FANS' EXPERIENCES

This chapter presents the individual and shared experiences of fandom that were conveyed by the NHL fans who were interviewed for this study. This study positioned their experiences of the lockout to be examined along four dimensions: becoming a fan, being a fan prior to the lockout, being a fan during the lockout including the fans' perceived relationship with the NHL upon the completion of the lockout, and the fans' actual relationship after the lockout.

From their experiences, it was evident many fans were becoming dissatisfied with the NHL prior to the lockout. They were disappointed when the 2004-2005 NHL season was cancelled due to the lockout, and appear to have increased their consumption of the NHL upon its return.

A short description of the fans who participated in the study is provided below in Table 1 to allow the readers to familiarize themselves with each of the fans.

Table 1: Description of the Fans Involved in this Study

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Favourite Team	Profession	Profile
Darryl	Male	39	Toronto Maple Leafs	Part owner of a Sports Pub/Kitchen Manager	Native of South Western Ontario now living in Calgary
Rich	Male	25	Montréal Canadiens	Quality Control with a Multi National Manufacturer	Lifelong resident of South Western Ontario
Dave	Male	25	Montréal Canadiens	Client Services Representative for a Technology Provider	Native of Eastern Ontario, now living in Southern Ontario
Juanita	Female	59	Toronto Maple Leafs	Buyer for a National Hardware Store Chain	Lifelong resident of South Western Ontario
Jeff	Male	32	Montréal Canadiens	Plant Manager for a Steel Processing Plant	Lifelong resident of Southern Ontario
Sarah	Female	24	Toronto Maple Leafs	Student	Lifelong resident of Southern Ontario
Victoria	Female	28	Toronto Maple Leafs	Student	Lifelong resident of Southern Ontario
Erica	Female	24	Toronto Maple Leafs	Childcare Worker	Native of Southern Ontario, now living in South Western Ontario
Wes	Male	24	Calgary Flames	Student	Lifelong resident of South Western Ontario
Chuck	Male	30-39	Buffalo Sabres	Journalist	Resident of New York State
Victor	Male	30-39	Buffalo Sabres	Sales Representative for a AAA Baseball Organization	Resident of New York State
Nick	Male	34	Toronto Maple Leafs	Quality Control with a Multi National Manufacturer	Lifelong resident of South Western Ontario
Ben	Male	36	Toronto Maple Leafs	Owner/Operator of an Auto Shop	Lifelong resident of Southern Ontario
Darren	Male	21	Columbus Blue Jackets	Plant Operator for a Large Manufacturer	Lifelong resident of South Western Ontario
Josh	Male	24	Toronto Maple Leafs	Student	Resident of Southern Ontario
Terry	Male	24	Toronto Maple Leafs	Accountant	Native of South Western Ontario, now living in Southern Ontario

Becoming a Fan

Research on fan behaviour has demonstrated that an individual becomes a fan when he/she exhibits consumption behaviours as well as begins to show emotional attachment with that sport brand (Funk & James, 2001; Hyatt, 2003). A review of the fan

behaviour literature revealed a number of potential catalysts for individuals transitioning from non-fans to fans (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996). These catalysts include the influence of family members (especially fathers), friends, and/or peers, and geographical reasons (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996). Some research also provided support for the notion that it is common for children (prior to the age of ten) to develop loyalties to teams (Kolbe & James, 2000). Many of the informants revealed one or more of these catalysts to have been influential in the development of their fandom.

Several themes emerged from the data. In the following pages, data are presented along these themes including: Family Influences, Cultural Influences, Youth Hockey Participation, and Geographical Influences. The organization of the data into themes allowed for a better understanding of the shared experiences of fans at the stage of becoming a fan.

Family Influences

Previous fan loyalty research has dealt with socializing agents in the development of team loyalty (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996). It has been found that family influence is the most powerful socializing agent for fan development, especially in children between the ages of six and 15 years-old (James, 2001; James & Kolbe, 2000; Wann et al., 1996). All the fans who participated in this study developed their fandom of the NHL or of their NHL team between these ages, thus according to the literature it could be presumed that a majority of these fans would identify a family member as the socializing agent in the development of their fandom (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996).

Of the 16 informants who were interviewed in the study, 14 stated that at least one family member was influential in their becoming a fan of an NHL team. The fans' developments of their fandom were consistent with the predictions of Kolbe and James (2000). However the breakdown of the most influential family member in their fandom was interesting. Eight of the fans reported their father to be the most influential on becoming a fan, while four reported their mothers, one reported her grandfather, and one, 24 year-old Erica, reported that her fandom was influenced equally by her mother and father.

Erica grew up in a Maple Leafs household - "if you are a Habs (Montréal Canadiens) fan don't come in my house" was her description of the family's ties to the team. Every hockey night, the family would gather together, light a fire, and watch the game on television. Her parents purchased a television to keep in the kitchen so that the family would not miss the first period if dinner was going to interfere with their watching of the game. This was a tradition in her household, and one that she remembers with fond memories. When asked if one of her parents was more influential than the other, Erica replied as follows, "[My father] taught me the rules, but my Mom taught me that when you love a team, you love a team." Erica's father was influential in her learning the game of hockey. He introduced her to the technical elements of the sport, but her mother introduced her to the emotional attachment that a loyal fan shares with a team.

She's always a fan. She's like me, the team can be sucking, but I'm still right there with it, but my father is very critical of the team. He's one of those kinds of fans, like watching a game will be like, you've got to ignore him kind of thing.

Erica believed that you need to support a team at all costs. She did not agree with the critical nature that fans exhibit, and this was taught to her by her mother.

A Father's Influence

According to Kolbe and James's (2000) findings, it would be presumed that the majority of the fans would report that their father was the most influential figure in the development of their fandom. These findings are consistent with those found in this study. Eight of the 16 fans reported their fathers to be the most influential figure for the development of their fandom. This result is similar with the finding that Kolbe and James (2000) reported. Fathers were reported to be the most influential socializing figure by 56% of their participants who became fans at the age of 12 and under, and by 40% of their participants who developed their fandom between the ages of 13 to 20 years (Kolbe & James, 2000). The participants in this study on NHL fans shared similar stories, in that their fathers were the ones who initially introduced them to the game of hockey as well as the consumption of the NHL brand.

Fifty-nine year old Juanita shared stories of her family using Saturday night hockey to share time with her father. She explained that the family would gather to watch Hockey Night in Canada with her father. It was accepted as a tradition. They would gather with her father and watch the games.

Thirty-two year old Jeff explained that his father was influential in his introduction to the sport as well as his fandom of the Montréal Canadiens, "My father was a huge Canadiens fan." When asked to share a story involving the NHL, Jeff was able to relate his fandom of the Montréal Canadiens to an event that took place in his life, in which his father quickly became elevated in his mind when he associated him with NHL greats.

One [story] that solidified my enjoyment of the NHL and in particular Montréal ... the old-timers used to tour Ontario ... So one time we went to a game in Welland and the old-timers were there, Gump Worsley and Jean Béliveau (two Canadiens greats), and I was there with my father, and it was during the warm-up. They were

out there warming-up and they skated up to the boards and “hey Frank” you know saying hi to my father. And from that I was awestruck. I went down and got autographs and everything, and I couldn’t believe that my Dad knew these hockey icons and what not. From then on you know as I said it made me like them even more knowing that my father, you know hung out with and knew these guys ... Awestruck by the fact that my father knew them, so a new appreciation for my father’s place in my hockey iconic world. But at the same time it brought the NHL sort of closer to home for me. I didn’t look at them as these out of reach, you know prima donnas.

Jeff’s story provides evidence supporting James’s (2001) suggestion that a father will introduce their child to their favourite sport, their favourite team, and in this case, the affiliation that he had with his childhood friends who had become NHL players. Jeff was introduced to a part of his father’s childhood. He felt a connection to the Montréal Canadiens and witnessed first hand the affiliation that his father had with the team and its players.

Twenty-five year old Rich, 28 year-old Victoria, 33 year-old Nick, and 25 year-old Terry shared commonalities in their fathers’ influences on their introduction to the NHL. All four explained that they would watch NHL hockey on television with their fathers. Each of the fans was asked how they originally became a fan of a team in the NHL? Their responses were as follows:

Rich - When I was younger my Dad and my brother watched hockey, so I think I just grew up watching hockey.

Nick - I would say watching hockey with my Dad. I spent some time with my Dad, one day I was watching hockey with him and I became a huge fan.

Terry - My Dad was a Leafs’s fan, and I was always watching Hockey Night in Canada as a kid, and they were the main team, so that’s kind of how I came to pick the Leafs.

Victoria - My Dad grew up as a Leafs’s fan. He’s from Sudbury, so that was the closest team. When I was growing up, we’d watch Leafs’s games, and it just kind of grew from there.

While television was the prevalent mode of consumption for the previous four participants, two of the fans: 24 year-old Wes and 36 year-old Ben shared stories of their fathers taking them to NHL games as the catalysts to becoming fans of the NHL.

Wes traveled to Michigan quite frequently as a child, participating in annual hockey tournaments that were held in the region. Some of his fondest memories involving hockey and the NHL in particular are associated with those tournaments. His father and the father of a teammate would take the two boys to Detroit Red Wings's games when they would be playing in Michigan. This was Wes's introduction to NHL hockey. He experienced the games live in Joe Louis Arena as a child. From there his fandom has grown, as well as his appreciation for hockey. "I became a fan of them because my father and friend from hockey, and his father would go to the games when we were playing hockey together."

Thirty-six year-old Ben grew up with the influence of the Toronto Maple Leafs being quite prevalent in his life. His uncle worked at the Scotia Bank across from Maple Leaf Gardens, where a number of his clients were Toronto Maple Leafs players. Ben was given autographed paraphernalia by his uncle at a very young age. Also, his uncle was given a number of free tickets to Maple Leafs's games that he would then give to Ben's father. Ben's father took him to a number of games, which crystalized the fandom that he experiences to this day.

Through my uncle we used to get free tickets all the time to the NHL games. My Dad would take me down to the games, and that is how I became a fan of the Leafs and the NHL.

The fans who reported their fathers as the major influence in the creation of their fandom, excluding Jeff, typically related their fathers' influence to the behaviours that

they exhibit as fans, as suggested by the research of Wann et al. (1996), Kolbe and James (2000), and James (2001). The fans who reported their fathers as the major influence in the creation of their fandom referred to consumption behaviours, rather than the emotional bonds that they have since developed with the teams. This is contrary to the stories shared by the individuals who reported their mothers as the most influential person in the development of their fandom.

A Mother's Influence

A large difference was uncovered between the findings of Kolbe and James (2000) and the present study's findings. Kolbe and James (2000) stated that family members other than fathers were reported to be the most important socializing agent ranging between 12.8% and 12.3% for the two age categories, the first for participants who became fans at the age of 12 and under, and the second for participants who became fans between the ages of 13 and 20. The Family Members category thus included mothers, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and others. Mothers were reported to be the person who had the greatest impact on the participants' fandom by 1.6% of Kolbe and James's (2000) sample.

These findings proved to differ greatly from those found with NHL fans in the present study. Family members, other than exclusively fathers, were reported to be the most powerful socializing agents by six (37.5%) of the fans, while mothers were reported to be the most powerful socializing agent by four (25%) of the fans who were interviewed. Kolbe and James (2000) found that family members were only reported to be the most powerful agent by just over 12% of the respondents, and they did not define mothers separately. The study of NHL fans found mothers to play a larger role in the

development of children's fandom as is presented in the stories shared by Dave, Chuck, Victor, and Darryl.

Dave grew up in a divided household. His mother was a fan of the Montréal Canadiens and his father was a fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Dave found himself in the middle of one of the greatest rivalries in NHL history (NHL, 2005). Early on, he did not have a definite favourite team. As many children in the Awareness Stage tend to do, he would go back and forth between favourite teams (Funk & James, 2001). Eventually though, it was with his mother Dave chose to align himself, as a Montréal Canadiens fan was formed. Dave was drawn to the storied franchise and its players. In his household, he was introduced to NHL greats such as Guy Lafleur, one of the greatest goal scorers in NHL history, and Patrick Roy, arguably the greatest goaltender throughout the history of hockey according to Dave.

My Mom ... really liked the Canadiens ... I was made aware of my favourite player through my Mom, because she was a Montréal fan with a Guy Lafleur jersey and all that stuff, and I was made aware of Patrick Roy through her.

Similar to Dave, Chuck, a journalist for a town newspaper located in the North Eastern United States echoed similar sentiments regarding the influence of his mother. Chuck grew up just outside of Buffalo, in a family who enjoyed sports, but it was his mother who was the main influence on his hockey consumption. "My Mom watched hockey a lot. That's where we get a lot of our sports influence, from my Mom." Chuck's older brother Victor, a sport marketer for a AAA baseball team located in a North Eastern United States city added to his brother's statement. "Actually between my Mom and my Dad, my Mom is the bigger sports fan." This does not contradict the findings that were reported by Kolbe and James (2000), but it does suggest that mothers should be

recognized as a distinct category rather than included under the category of 'family influences.'

Thirty-nine year-old Darryl was the only fan of those who reported their mothers to be the socializing agent on their fandom of an NHL team to indicate that he did not attach himself to the same team as his mother. Darryl did not describe his introduction with the same intensity as the other fans who reported their mothers to be their socializing agent. Darryl was raised primarily by his mother. She was his main influence as it pertained to sports and hockey in particular. His Mom could not afford for him or his brother to play hockey, but they would play road hockey on a regular basis. As James (2001) suggested, the child would be introduced in this case to the mother's rather than the father's favourite sport and thus be exposed to her favourite team. Yet Darryl differed from the norm in the sense that he chose his mother's team's rival.

He remembered spending Saturday nights on his Mom's lap watching Hockey Night in Canada. It was through those experiences that his attachment to the NHL and the Toronto Maple Leafs in particular began. "Six years old sitting on my Mom's lap on a Saturday night. That's what it was, this is hockey. I became a fan then." It is possible that his choice of his mother's team's rival was the reason behind Darryl's limited level of emotional attachment while describing his introduction to the NHL. His mother was not influential in him choosing to follow the Leafs. The reason he chose to follow them was because of the colours. He was attracted to the blue and white. When asked if his mother remained influential, Darryl explained: "Nope, Mom's a Rehab fan and I'm a Leaf fan."¹

¹The term 'Rehab' is a negative reference to the Montréal Canadiens and their nickname the Habs, which is short for 'Les Habitants'

There could be many reasons for the discrepancy uncovered between the prominence of mothers' influences on the children's fandom in Kolbe and James (2000) and the present study on NHL fans. The major difference could be found in the sampling of the respondents. Kolbe and James (2000) surveyed individuals who ranged from 36 and 55 years of age, asking them to recall the age when they first became a fan. These fans were surveyed in the late 1990s and they were asked to recall their childhoods that took place from the 1950s to the 1970s. This is compared to the fans who were interviewed for the present study who ranged from 21 to 59 years of age, with only one fan being over 39 years of age. Therefore the childhoods of these fans took place from the 1970s to the 1990s and a majority recalled the 1980s as being the era in which the formation took place. Fifteen of the 16 fans who participated in this study became fans in decades which saw strives toward equality with respect to gender reaching unprecedented levels in history (cf. Hall, 1997). It could be presumed that as women have gained increased access in society that mothers have become more prevalent as socializing agents.

The fans who shared that their mothers were the socializing agent in the formation of their fandom shared stories of watching games with their mothers, and associating themselves with their mothers' favourite team, except for Darryl. Perhaps sports are becoming less male dominated in Western society and these findings may suggest that women's prominence in sport is increasing.

A Grandfather's Influence

The only family member who was reported to be the most influential figure, other than the father or mother of the fans, was the grandfather. In their research, Kolbe and

James (2000) did not have a distinct category for grandparents. Grandparents were positioned in the “Other Relatives” category, which was the category reported by 3.4% of the respondents as the most influential person as it pertained to their fandom. Sarah was the only participant whose most influential family member would be categorized as an “Other Relative” according to Kolbe and James’s (2000) results.

Sarah’s grandfather played semi-professional hockey when he was younger. He was a passionate fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs, and Sarah remembers developing the same passion as a child when her grandfather would babysit her and her sister.

Papa was a huge hockey fan ... I remember going over to his house while he babysat us and he’d stick us in front (of the television) and that was how we would bond with him ... He was a fan of the Maple Leafs. So of course at that age it is very influential, and I started to love it, and my sister and I started to watch on our own ... that connection to my Papa started my love for the game.

Sarah explained that her family continues to acknowledge her grandfather’s influence in their attachment to the Leafs as they have his picture positioned by the television, so that he can continue to watch the games with the family. She said that she continues to share that connection with her grandfather every time that she watches the Leafs play “When I’m watching I’m thinking that he’s sitting right there with me, and when they don’t win I’m thinking they’re not winning it for him.”

These results regarding family influences on fandom are representative of findings from previous fan behaviour studies (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996). Family influences were found to be influential in the creation of 14 of the 16 fans’ relationship with the NHL. Eight of the fans reported their fathers to be the most influential person, while four reported their mothers as the most influential figure, one reported her mother to be influential in her emotional attachment, while her father was

influential in her behavioural attachment to the team, and one reported her grandfather to be the most influential person in her introduction to the NHL, and her favourite team in particular.

Cultural Influences

Hockey plays a prominent role in Canadian history and culture (Edge, 2004). Canada has been one of the most successful nations in international hockey competitions at all levels from Olympic competition, World Championships, Women's Championships, and International Minor hockey competitions (Hockey Canada, 2006). The prominence of hockey in Canadian culture became extremely prevalent in the response of the individuals regarding their initial attachment to the NHL.

A common response was given by five of the 16 fans, who stated that hockey was innate within Canadians. This is similar to the finding reported by Kolbe and James (2000) who investigated the influences of individuals who became fans of the NFL Cleveland Browns'. Similar to hockey in Canada, the Browns are viewed as an institution in Cleveland (Kolbe & James, 2000). When asked to report the accuracy of the statement the Browns are a Cleveland institution on a 7-point Likert Scale, with 7 being extremely influential, the results yielded a mean of 5.99 (Kolbe & James, 2000).

Similar to Browns's fans, the Canadian hockey fans expressed that hockey was a cultural expectation. The two fans who exemplified this best were Rich and Josh. They believed that it was a cultural expectation as a Canadian that you would become a fan of hockey, similar to the Browns being an institution in Cleveland. Rich is a Montréal Canadiens fan who grew up in a household where his father and older brother were both fans of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Rich never played organized ice hockey, but was a

regular when it came to the neighbourhood road hockey games. When asked how he became a fan of a team in the NHL, Rich replied:

I honestly think it was just instilled in me. When I was younger my Dad and my brother watched hockey, so I think I just grew up watching hockey. I picked my own team by just watching for the style that I liked.

Similar to Rich, Josh never played organized hockey himself. Josh grew up in a Canadian-Italian household in a suburb of Toronto. His father does not watch hockey, he is an avid soccer fan, and has never taken to hockey. His mother does watch hockey, but her attraction has grown as Josh's has. Josh could not identify what it was that initially attracted him to hockey, he suggested that it was something more than any one person introducing him to the sport, league, and/or team. His attraction to the Maple Leafs has always been a part of his life, "Wow, I've been a fan pretty much since I could watch TV. Watched hockey as a kid ..."

These fans reported that the NHL has been a part of their life as far back as they could remember. A similarity between Josh and Rich was that they could not identify the time that they became a fan, because they could not remember a time when they were not a fan of their favourite teams. The manner in which they conveyed these stories gave me the impression that they were expressing something that I should already have known [being Canadian myself]. Their association with the NHL is culturally innate, and thus they did not take much time to explain their initial associations, because they may have felt that myself as a Canadian, I would have experienced it as well. Therefore, they did not feel there was a need to expand on that initial attraction because it is inherent in all Canadians. In Wann et al.'s (1996) investigation on the reasons for currently, originally, and no longer following their favourite team, a very small number of respondents (0.3%)

reported that they originally followed a team because it was expected/required of them to be a fan. It could be presumed by the responses of Jeff and Rich they would fall in this category.

Youth Hockey Participation

Nine of the 16 fans shared stories involving their participation in organized hockey leagues at a young age. Darren, the second fan who did not identify a family member as being influential in his introduction to the NHL, actually related his initial attraction to the NHL as coinciding with his introduction to playing organized hockey. This was dissimilar from the findings by James (2001), Kolbe and James (2000), and Wann et al. (1996). The impact of sport participation during the childhoods of loyal sport fans did not appear to be significant in these three studies of development of team loyalty. In fact the response that related closest to youth participation in these three studies which had the strongest significance was reported in Wann et al.'s (1996) study when they found that 3.8% of their respondents began following their favourite team because they liked the sport in which the team participated. Participating in a sport could be tied to the variable "because I liked the sport", and thus could be presumed to have yielded a smaller percentage than the measured variable in Wann et al.'s (1996) study, because they like the sport. Yet, youth hockey participation proved to garner a degree of attention in the interviews of NHL fans.

Darren has played hockey at a high level for a number of years. He is currently negotiating with a semi-professional team in the Mid Western United States to join the organization as a forward. Hockey has been an instrumental part of Darren's life as long as he can remember. He has always wanted to be a goaltender, but his father would not

allow it, so he became a forward. Darren explained how his introduction to the NHL was at the same time as his introduction to the sport of hockey itself. "I'd say probably when I was five years old and started playing hockey myself, and just kind of ended up following the whole NHL."

Terry had a similar description of his introduction to the NHL as Darren had. Terry timed his introduction to the NHL with the age he began to play hockey himself. "I guess it started...I started playing hockey when I was about four years old probably."

The experiences of Darren and Terry were not unlike those of Wes who associated his NHL fandom to his participation with youth hockey. He explained that he would attend live NHL games in Detroit whenever he was there for his own hockey tournaments. "We would go to the games when we were playing hockey together. I had tournaments there." Wes's simultaneous consumption of hockey, both from a participant's and an NHL fan's perspective helped to strengthen his passion for the sport, which he ultimately associated with the NHL. It became evident that the nine fans who reported participating in youth hockey associated their own hockey playing experiences with their experiences with the NHL. This could possibly relate to the famous psychological study of Pavlov's dog (as cited in Dewsbury, 1997). Pavlov discovered that if you pair an unconditioned stimulus such as the enjoyment that individuals experienced while participating in hockey with the conditioned stimulus, such as consuming NHL games and/or merchandise, the individual may become classically conditioned to experience the same enjoyment from consuming the NHL as they do/did while participating in the sport (Dewsbury, 1997). The influence of youth hockey participation

proved to be more prevalent in the current study than it was reported to be in the investigations by James (2001), Kolbe and James (2000), and Wann et al. (1996).

Geographical Influences

Relatively few fans who were interviewed reported geographical influences to be important in their choice of their favourite team. Only four of the 16 fans stated that geography had an influence on the choice of their favourite team. This finding coincides with the findings of James (2001) who reported geography to have an effect on initial attraction to a favourite team, yet it was not as influential as family influences.

When asked about his initial attraction to his favourite team Jeff stated: "My birthplace being my favourite team." Jeff was born in Montréal, but grew up in Southern Ontario. The ties that his family had with the city of Montréal were influential in his choice to follow the Montréal Canadiens to the extent that he developed both an emotional and behavioural attachment to them. This was similar to the study by Kolbe and James (2000), who found that participants reported that the Browns being their hometown team had a large impact on their fandom with a mean of 6.19 out of 7 for the hometown importance.

Two other fans who reported geographical influences to have been important in their choice of their favourite teams were the two American fans, Chuck and Victor. When asked how they became fans of the Buffalo Sabres, they responded:

Chuck - Living here, growing up here that's how I became a fan.

Victor - Just growing up in the area basically.

It is interesting to note that the two American fans both noted that geographical influences were important to them forming an attraction to their favourite team. This was

similar to the reasoning of Josh, who shared his thoughts that growing up in Toronto impacted his choice when it came to the NHL team with which he affiliated. Josh stated that he chose the “hometown” team. The responses of Chuck, Victor, and Josh were supportive of Kolbe and James’s (2000) finding that growing up in Cleveland was the most influential social/community issue for individuals becoming fans of the Cleveland Browns. The opposite was reported by Terry.

I grew up in a small town called Port Lambton Ontario, just outside of Sarnia. So, it would seem that I would most likely be a Detroit Red Wings fan, but I ended up becoming a Toronto Maple Leafs fan.

The examination of the NHL fans’ stories revealed commonalities with respect to geographical influences similar to those presented in James’s (2001), and Kolbe and James’s (2000) investigation into fans’ initial attractions with their favourite team. Geographical influences were reported by several fans, but were less influential than family members.

Being a Fan Prior to the Lockout

This section deals with fans’ behaviours prior to the lockout season of 2004-2005. As well as the behaviours, we will examine the emotional attachments that the fans shared with the teams. Being able to show both behavioural and emotional attachment to their favourite team was required to demonstrate that the fans fell into one of either the Attachment or Allegiance categories outlined by Funk and James’s (2001) PCM to be eligible to participate in the study.

A Part of the Team

Fans are able to consume their favourite team in many different ways. Consumption can take the form of attending live sporting events, watching events on

television, watching the highlights of the event, reading about the event in the newspaper and/or the internet, and even by wearing your favourite team's merchandise for others to associate you with the team (Hyatt, 2003). Fans' consumption practices prior to the lockout were found to be varied as it pertains to method, yet the frequency was reported to be similar for those who participated in the study.

Each of the 16 fans reported the consumption of their favourite team's games predominantly by watching them on television. Participants, such as Sarah, Victoria, Ben, and Rich reported attending at least two games per season prior to the lockout. However, it was not surprising to find that watching television broadcasts and attending live NHL games were not the only methods that the fans reported consuming their favourite teams, as suggested by Hyatt (2003).

Darryl does not work the usual 9 to 5 hours to which most in North America are accustomed. As a cook and part owner of a sports pub, his busiest hours of operation are during the dinner hours, and with the time difference between Toronto and Calgary being two hours, Toronto's seven o'clock games coincide with the beginning of his hectic evening schedule, but Darryl, an Ontario native did not allow that to affect his consumption of the Maple Leafs.

Well I always knew what day the Leafs were going to be playing – if it was a Wednesday or a Tuesday and who they were playing. I always keep track of the Leafs. And Hockey Night in Canada, it's a Saturday night, I've got to watch it. If I can't watch it because I'm working, I'm listening to it on the radio.

Although television and radio were the methods Darryl reported to use most frequently to consume the Maple Leafs's games, he suggested that he participated with the team through other avenues as well. An interesting way in which Darryl participates with the

Toronto Maple Leafs is by actively participating in charities with which Maple Leafs players associate.

Well I always contribute money to the children's hospital. Ah a few players on the Leafs are right into the Make a Wish Foundation and stuff like that, so I figure that's my contribution towards it. It makes me feel like one of the guys.

Darryl was the only fan who shared a story of that nature where he participated in a charitable organization with which the players are associated. Darryl reported to use whatever methods were available to him to consume a majority of the Leafs's hockey games. The frequency to which Darryl followed his Maple Leafs game by game and day by day was similar to the frequency in which the other fans reported to participate, yet Darryl believed that his fandom extended further than simply consuming their games. He felt that his association extended into his and his favourite team's charity work.

The Long Distance Fan

The emphasis of interviewing loyal fans of NHL teams in the South Western and Southern Ontario regions led to a diverse group of fans, in terms of the variety of teams with which the fans were aligned. Six of the 16 fans who were interviewed did not live in their favourite team's region at the time of the interview. These fans reported following their teams using a wider variety of methods than did the 10 fans who lived within their teams' region.

Wes was unable to watch or even listen to each Calgary Flames's game, so he had to find alternative ways to consume the Flames. When asked about how the NHL or the Flames in particular fit into his daily routines prior to the lockout, Wes provided this response.

Pretty much checking scores and stats, watching games. Looking to see if they beat a team that my friend liked, but it didn't happen too often ... [I checked]

mostly London Free Press before school to check scores, whether it was the Flames or not, just to see what happened the night before, and then just watching the games on TV, and then I use the internet often now to check the scores.

As part of his daily routine, Wes explained:

Wake up in the morning, eat breakfast, look over the newspaper, it would pretty much just be the sports section, and then throughout the day, well I'd play hockey probably five times throughout the week, so that would usually occur after school. So, depending on what time my games were I'd come home and check the score or watch whatever game was on. The Flames weren't usually on TV so...

When asked about his daily routines involving the NHL, Rich, a native of South Western Ontario, a ten hour drive to Montréal, and a lifelong fan of the Montréal Canadiens explained that it was difficult to take in a majority of the team's games because they were not broadcasted in Ontario. Rich had to rely on the newspaper and internet to follow his favourite team. Hyatt (2003) suggested that consumption of one's favourite team is not limited to viewing a televised game or attending a live game. It was found that fans who did not live within their favourite team's region reported to have consumed their favourite team's with the same frequency as those who lived within their team's television region prior to the lockout, however the long distance fans used a wider variety of methods to consume their favourite team.

Hockey Night in Canada

Hockey Night in Canada has been a national institution in Canada since 1952 (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005). In the present study, as a number of the fans reported Saturday nights to be dedicated to Hockey Night in Canada. Darryl noted that Hockey Night in Canada was a must in his week. Juanita reported that Saturday night's Hockey Night in Canada was a lifelong ritual and she had now transferred it to her children.

It was sort of a Saturday night ritual among other things ... but it was something that my youngest son and I did all the time, watching the games when they were on. Definitely a Saturday night thing to do is sit and watch the Toronto Maple Leafs play.

In the last few years before the lockout Jeff's attachment to the NHL began to dwindle. He remained attached to the Montréal Canadiens, but he found himself becoming disinterested with the NHL. However, even this fan who was quickly becoming disassociated with the NHL still referenced his Saturday nights to be hockey nights, "If the boys were over on a Saturday evening and if there was some beer to be had and the game was on and you watched it."

Victoria shared her feelings that "Saturday nights are for hockey". She and her boyfriend would set aside Saturday nights for the NHL. It was a regular occurrence for her to watch both the Maple Leafs's game as well as the second game of the double header. The double header being the two games that CBC televises, the first being from an Eastern Canadian team (typically the Toronto Maple Leafs) and the second being one or two of the Western teams, if they are playing each other (Calgary Flames, Edmonton Oilers, and/or Vancouver Canucks).

Terry had expressed that Hockey Night in Canada was influential for developing an attachment to the Toronto Maple Leafs. The Toronto Maple Leafs games televised each Saturday night by CBC, and they are for the most part reserved to the seven o'clock evening Eastern timeslot. Terry grew up in a small town and did not have cable television. He was restricted to a small number of channels that were available to him, and CBC was one of them. Weekday games were not available in Terry's region so he had to plan his viewing around Saturday nights and Hockey Night in Canada, "[I] only watch maybe one game a week, that being Hockey Night in Canada." Terry continued his

loyal viewing of Hockey Night in Canada even after he moved away from home to go to university. Hockey Night in Canada always had a place in Terry's life, and it continued to play a large part up to the lockout season of 2004-2005.

The influence of Hockey Night in Canada on NHL fans was largely apparent throughout the interviews. It was even noted by the two American participants to have played a large role in their fandom of the NHL. Hockey Night in Canada has become an institution in Canada (NHL, 2005), but the NHL needed to do more for the other six nights in the week to garner even a portion of the attention that Saturday nights did for NHL fans.

Some Were Frustrated With the NHL

In the early 2000s, the NHL lost some of its popularity in North American professional sport (Farber, 2004). It was well known that the NHL needed to improve its product and image (Farber, 2004; Farber, Bechtel, & Cannella, 2004). The experts were predicting that the 2005 season would be preceded by a league-wide lockout (Farber, 2004; Farber, Bechtel, & Cannella, 2004).

As the doomed lockout approached, many fans were becoming disinterested in the NHL for various reasons. Of the 16 loyal fans who were interviewed for this study, 14 voiced their displeasure with either the operations and/or product that the NHL was putting on the ice. The NHL was disappointing even their most loyal of fans. Surely if they were detracting their loyal fans, they would find it difficult to attract the casual ones. For example, Victoria voiced her displeasure with the NHL and professional sports in general.

Even though I consider myself pretty die hard Leafs's fan, I was becoming somewhat disgruntled I guess with the whole NHL business, professional sport in

general. Even being in sport management I've gotten into some pretty heated discussions with fellow students about it. And, I was just getting kind of frustrated ...primarily with the whole salary issue. I think it is just out of hand. To get paid a million dollars a year to play a sport to me is unfathomable, you know the CFL guys make 60 grand a year if you are a good player, you know, and have to hold down a full time job in the off season ... I was just getting really frustrated with the financials more than anything.

When asked whether or not the financial aspect of the NHL and the teams affect her allegiance to the Leafs, she explained.

I don't think that it affected my allegiance to the Leafs, I think that it was the NHL and like I said pro sports in general, aside from maybe the CFL. I never had a negative feeling about the CFL, because it is not an issue there. But, yeah basketball, I don't even watch basketball anymore, and football I've never been a fan of...It wasn't that I was specifically annoyed by the Leafs, it was the league in general. I was equally frustrated with the Leafs as I was with the Boston Bruins, or the Colorado Avalanche... I still don't think anyone is even worth a million dollars to play hockey, but I think it is the players who don't perform, no matter what team they are on, sometimes I think that Sundin falls into that category, but you know, like right now, an Aki Berg or a Wade Belak, why do you still have them. And, then you have a player who is making six million dollars a year and is brutal, is not putting up the numbers, is not performing. I think that it is more of an individual player level rather than team.

The growing displeasure with aspects of the NHL's business operations were also shared by Darryl, however rather than directing his displeasure solely at the players, he was more apt to spread it and direct it to the executives of the NHL and of the franchises, as well as to players.

Prior to [the lockout] I never liked the executives, because all they ever thought about was money, money, money. It is a business to them, not a sport like it should be. It's a game. They take it as a business and they want money, money, money. But, as for the players' concern, for example Eric Lindros denying to go to the Québec Nordiques where he was drafted, as far as I'm concerned it's a privilege to play in the NHL, and you sit there and tell someone I'm not playing for you because I'm too good, that's bullshit. That's why I've never been an Eric Lindros fan.

While interviewing brothers Chuck and Victor, the two North Eastern American residents, I asked about their interest in the NHL prior to the lockout. Both Chuck and

Victor reported that their interest was decreasing in the few years prior to the lockout. The lack of interest for both was associated with the slow game that had begun to dominate the NHL. The “trap” was a strategy that was employed by coaches in the NHL to make it as difficult as possible for opposing teams to penetrate their defensive zone. Coaches would have one player pressure the opposition while the other four players would stay back in the neutral zone to intercept any passes by the opposition. This style of game proved to be very successful in terms of wins/losses records, however it slowed the game down to a halt. Chuck explained this further from a fan’s perspective:

Well prior, I’d say that it was frustrating a little bit for a few reasons. One; the game changed from the Edmonton Oilers and Pittsburgh Penguins of the 1980s to a style of the trap, clutching and grabbing, and low scoring.

In Victor’s description of the style of NHL that he enjoyed and enjoys to this day, he does not include the few years prior to the lockout. He is speaking of the present NHL game and that of the 1980s and early 1990s, but has omitted the era governed by the 1995 CBA (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005).

Montréal Canadiens fans voiced their displeasure

The consumption practices for most of the 16 fans were frequent as they pertained to the NHL brand and their favourite teams in particular. However, there were two fans in particular who did not share the same consumption frequencies as reported by the remaining 14 in the last few years prior to the lockout. Dave did not find himself watching the NHL as regularly as he had in previous years.

For a while I had lost interest in hockey in general. Mainly when I was in University and OAC (grade 13 in Ontario) I had lost interest in hockey. I didn’t really keep up quite as much as I had when I was younger. I don’t know why that is, priorities change I guess...The year before the lockout I started to get back into hockey a little bit, purely because I got into a hockey pool with a bunch of my friends and it forced me to pay attention, and I started getting back into it, but not

as much as I used to be. During the lull, I wouldn't follow hockey, but the Canadiens I would still follow, but I wouldn't go out of my way to watch Dallas play St Louis or something like that. I didn't care.

When asked about how the NHL fit into his daily routines, Dave explained:

Well before I would always wake up early and watch TSN Sportsdesk highlights as it was, and I would read the paper about the team, and when we got internet at home I would go online to see how the team did, and how everyone was doing. That kind of changed once I started losing interest in the team and in the league ... I think that a lot of it coincided with when I stopped playing hockey myself, in that I just didn't follow it quite as much. I didn't have as much in common with it.

Jeff shared a very similar story as it pertained to his consumption of the NHL prior to the lockout.

I think the NHL in general it is easier to relate to in this area. It is tough being a Canadiens's fan and following them on a day to day basis. You know I'm not a satellite subscriber, so I don't get the NHL package. The only time I get to see their games is when they are playing Toronto ... Prior to the lockout with the NHL I would watch games every now and again, when I could, but I was really busy with other facets of life, you know kids and everything else. It was kind of almost a vague following of it. I played hockey, I coached a lot of hockey and everything, but it wasn't that big of a deal for me prior to the lockout. I kind of had almost just lost interest in it... With professional hockey in general I think I just didn't have time for it, and because I didn't have time to check up on the stats and things on top of it...you didn't go out of your way to stay home and watch hockey.

When asked about his daily routine, Jeff explained:

I'd flip through the sports page to see who's winning and who's losing, stuff like that, you know see who's the goal scoring leader and things like that, not to a fanatical sense just sort of a general interest, like looking at – did anybody I know have a baby today. Yeah it was the same sort of thing, as I'd flip by I'd check it out to see what's going on. I kept on top of the trade situations on the radio and things like that, but I didn't make it so that at 11:45 each day I went on NHL.com and find out who was doing what or anything.

These two Montréal Canadiens fans reported that the NHL was not developing a product that they craved or needed to consume prior to the lockout.

Playoff Time

The consumption of one's favourite team was reported to be a special time in a loyal fan's life by Rich, Erica, and Ben. The playoffs were unique. This was a time when their favourite team's successes or failures enveloped their lives.

Erica was a regular viewer of the Maple Leafs throughout the regular season, but the playoffs were unique, as they called for jobs to be put to the wayside. She would regularly take time off work if it interfered with her taking in a Maple Leafs's playoff game. Rich shared similar experiences. If he was unable to watch a televised game or listen to it on the radio during the regular season he would read about it the next day in the paper. However, when it came to playoff games Rich reported to either watch it on television or listen to it on the radio, with no exceptions. Ben shared similar playoff experiences to those of Erica and Rich.

For me it was pretty much, especially in the playoffs, yeah if it was a playoff night my wife and kids were nowhere around. I was given the TV downstairs and that was the ritual. The wife would go to bed, the kids would go to bed, and they'd know that I would have to have my TV, especially with my Leafs in the playoffs, I'm living this dream every year, like every other Leafs's fan is. Leafs Nation as we call it...we hope every year that this is going to be the year, every year we get disappointed, and every year we come back again, and hope this wouldn't happen again. I do have the Leafs's flag, all the years that they won the cup. I put it in my front window of my house, every year when the playoffs start. My wife doesn't like that I do it, but I do it, she lets me do it. So all my neighbours and friends who go by see that the playoffs have started and that the flag is up; and away we go. And the day after they are done we take the flag down and it goes back down to the basement until the next year, when hopefully they make the playoffs again.

Playoffs proved to be a special time for these three fans. The NHL playoffs consumed the fans' lives. They reported that their daily schedule revolved around their favourite teams' competitions. Yet as Farber (2004) suggested the playoff phenomenon was not felt across North America, with the NHL yielding historically low ratings for a

playoff game in the spring of 2004. The playoff excitement was unique to loyal fans of the NHL. The league was not attracting the casual fan (Farber, 2004). As reported by the fans in the study, there were people who were following the NHL's every move and breaking stories, however as reported by Farber (2004) the majority of North Americans were indifferent to the league. The NHL had a great challenge in front of them, they needed to regain the public's interest.

Being a Fan during the Lockout

The next section explores the experiences shared by fans throughout the lockout season of 2004-2005. Sub-sections to follow include: the Salary Cap, Feelings on the Lockout, It's not a Game it's a Business, Who Was to Blame, Managers Side With Management, Personal Impact from the Lockout, Alternative Hockey Consumption, the London Knights, and the Poker Sensation.

Salary Cap

The salary cap is a tool implemented by owners to ensure cost certainty (Deacon, 2004). The cap became the sticking point between owners and the players' association. Owners, and in particular Gary Bettman, were adamant that the CBA negotiations taking place during the lockout needed to include a salary cap, and the owners would not accept an agreement that did not include a cap.

Fans interviewed for this study, shared similar sentiments to Deacon (2004). Deacon suggested that professional sports require a salary cap for their leagues to flourish. The fans understood the owners' perspective that the salary cap was a necessity for the NHL, as demonstrated by Ben.

They had to get a cap involved, they had to. The cap is for the owners because they can't stop themselves, they need to stop themselves. The cap stops the owners from spending like drunken sailors.

While the fans reported that they believed the salary cap was going to be positive for the NHL, they became increasingly disheartened as the NHLPA continued to announce publicly that they refused to accept a salary cap in their negotiations (Deacon, 2004). The fans felt that the cap was inevitable, and at times became frustrated that the players' association would not accept it.

Jeff - So many other major sports leagues have salary caps, and it had to be done for the same reasons, it only made sense.

It made sense to many who were examining the situation from the outside (cf. Deacon, 2004; Farber, 2004, TSN 2005). Salary caps have been integral in creating parity throughout professional sports leagues, resulting in a more competitive atmosphere (Deacon, 2004). We believed that the cap would enhance the competitive nature that other professional sport leagues enjoy.

It creates a more equal playing ground, where before you had teams that were spending \$30M on their overall salaries, and others spending \$70M or \$80M, so now when they are all within a 15M dollar range of each other, it's not necessarily buying yourself a Stanley Cup anymore. You have to actually create a team ... it's just more fair playing grounds, making the league more competitive.

The success of the other professional sport leagues, and in particular the most financially successful of all the North American professional sport leagues, the NFL (Bannister, 2004) was becoming the envy of the NHL fans. Fans have been able to see the benefits of a salary cap for the NFL, and became less supportive of the NHL players who were opposed to the implementation of a cap. Jeff noted that NFL players were not complaining. The fans found it difficult to empathize with millionaire hockey players

who were not willing to have a cap placed on their salaries by the individuals who pay those salaries.

Sarah - When they say I can't take a salary cap, well why not? What are you thinking? You are making more than doctors who are arguably doing better service than is a hockey player.

In the end an agreement about a salary cap was reached by both parties. It must be noted that fans of the Toronto Maple Leafs suggested that the cap had negatively affected their team, which, in the past, was used to buying top priced players in the pursuit of a Stanley Cup (TSN, 2005). The Maple Leafs were forced to cut their payroll and are now on an equal playing ground in terms of the amount of money that they can spend on players with other NHL teams. While noting that the cap has negatively affected their team, Maple Leafs's fans did suggest that the salary cap will have an overall positive effect on the NHL as a league. Several fans noted that the implementation of the salary cap will allow for small market teams to compete on a level playing field with large market teams. This will be examined further in the section entitled 'Being a Fan after the Lockout.'

Feelings on the Lockout

It was an aim of the study to uncover emotions that the fans experienced throughout the lockout. This is unique when compared to past studies such as Wakefield (1995), and Boyd and Krehbiel (1999) who have investigated the effects of work stoppages on fans of professional sport leagues. These two studies examined the negative effects that the work stoppages had on attendances in MLB in order to provide sport marketers with strategies and tools to decrease the negative impacts that work stoppages may have (Boyd & Krehbiel, 1999; Wakefield, 1995).

Allowing the fans to tell their stories gave them an opportunity to express emotions they felt about the lockout. For many fans, they relished the opportunity to tell their side of the experience, as reported by NHLfans.com (2004), the untold side of the experience.

Darryl - It was bullshit. Plain and simple ... a few teams were hurting and may have had to shut down because of not having a salary cap and this and that, but I still believe that both of them [owners and players] were in the wrong. I'm glad they came back, but I still believe that both were in the wrong. You know, how hard is it to compromise a few million dollars to watch a game? That's all it is, it's a game, and people would sit there and say we want more money, and they'd say well we're not going to give you more. The argument was stupid ... That's why it took so long with the lockout, because they were both stubborn idiots ... I was pissed off. Like when it got to day 300, I was like give me a break. What's the only other time the season's been cancelled, because of the war, which is understandable, even though they kind of kept playing, a lot of the players were over in the war.

As evidenced by the statements made by Darryl, the lockout itself was not what annoyed the fans of the NHL who were interviewed for the study, but rather it was the length of time the lockout lasted. As previously mentioned, the longest work stoppage prior to 2004-2005 was the half season that was lost due to the labour dispute in 1994-1995 (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005). However, with the end of the 1994-1995 labour dispute, the NHL season was shortened, and the Stanley Cup was awarded in June of that year. The lockout of 2004-2005 began similarly to the labour dispute of 1994-1995, but realization that this was not going to result in a shortened season quickly became a reality for fans.

Chuck - I think my thoughts were, okay this has happened before. It will be over by December or January, they'll be back to playing hockey. You know I was disappointed, but it had been talked about, so you knew it was going to happen. I think the frustrating thing to me, was that when they were going to go on strike, why aren't the two sides talking? They've been talking about it for about a year and a half. But, when January, February came, and they announced that there was

no season, it was pretty upsetting, I wasn't sure how I felt, whether or not I was going to be a fan of the game still.

Chuck was able to convey the same feelings regarding the two parties' (NHL owners and NHLPA) unwillingness to solve the issues that resulted in the lockout. Sarah shared the emotion of anger that Darryl and Chuck had displayed, but she took it one step further. After accepting that the lockout was a reality and realizing that being angry with the situation was not going to solve the issue, Sarah began to feel sad. She realized that she would be without the NHL and in particular without her Maple Leafs.

When it first happened, before reading anything about it, your first emotional reaction is anger. I was pretty mad. You're thinking these people are making money to play hockey, how are you even going to consider striking. That was my first reaction, and then, I got a little sad about it. Your Saturday night is totally different. You try and flip it on and there's nothing. I mean there is the alternative, I mean the AHL and OHL, but when you have the connection to the team it's not the same to see the other league. So I think that at first it was like a shock, but then, you start to look at all of the issues that are occurring and you realize that there are leaders and it is a business and there's a whole bunch of things that you have to consider. But I think that I was pretty mad when it first happened, it does change your image of the league, you sort of view it as a business, but you want it to be your league, but no it's a business. They are going to do things that you don't agree with.

Other fans also shared sentiments of anger and frustration as it pertained to the 2004-2005 lockout. The fans were not angry with the lockout itself, but rather with the manner in which it was handled. The lockout became a process that dragged on, unnecessarily in the minds of the fans. As outlined by Sarah, this was no longer about a sport, it was a business.

It's Not a Game it's a Business

It became apparent while interviewing fans of the NHL that it is no longer a game. The fans wished that the players and owners could remember that it is a game. Jeff, Ben, Darryl, and Victoria all made the same statement, "it's no longer a game it's a

business.” This is apparent when you consider the amount of money that comes into the hands of all parties involved in sports. Revenues generated from gate receipts have experienced huge increases in recent years. Ticket prices for NHL games were experiencing regular increases prior to the lockout of 2004-2005. An example of these increases is the ticket prices for the Chicago Blackhawks franchise. In the 1993-1994 season, the price for front row tickets to a Chicago Blackhawks game cost \$52.50 (Max, 2003). In 2003-2004 the average ticket price for a Chicago Blackhawks’s game nearly equaled the highest ticket price of 1993-1994, with the average ticket price being \$50 with the highest ticket having escalated to \$75 (Front Row Tickets, 2006). As well as the increases in revenues, the number of fans paying to attend sporting events has also experienced huge increases in recent years. Spectator sports have increased gate receipts by \$1.2 billion annually from 1970 to 1994 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1996). Coinciding with the increase in revenues generated by gate receipts was the significant increase in attendance that professional sports experienced from 1985 to 1998 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This is important because it explains that it is not simply that sporting events’ average costs have increased. Professional sport teams are also experiencing increasing revenues because the number of individuals attending these events has also increased in that time.

Victor, a lifelong fan of the Buffalo Sabres, felt that the players would give in to the demands of the owners, but in the end he realized that this was not about the game of hockey, but rather the business.

In most strikes some of these players are going to cross the line, and others are going to follow and I kind of thought something like that was going to happen, and actually it seemed like they were going to go we’ll keep them out and we’re going to hold out. In the end I didn’t think that they would go the whole year. It

looked like the owners would have gone another year if they needed to get the salary cap. Ultimately I think they did the right thing. They say it is about the fans, they talk about it, but it's about the players making money, it's about the owners making money.

Victoria felt that the lockout only fueled her displeasure with professional sport.

Management and players were continuing to search for the financial resources, which in the end she felt was ruining professional sport.

I think that both sides were at fault. They were both greedy. They were both immature babies about it. I think it all stems from Goodenow and Bettman taking pot shots at each other, escalating from there into a pissing match. It was so frustrating to watch it. For sport in general, it was a black mark. The only league to lose a season due to a labour dispute. I was very upset about the lockout. It should never have happened. Somebody should have stepped up and been the bigger side and said you know what this is ridiculous. So frustration and annoyance would be the two biggest words to describe my feelings about the lockout.

Victoria showed enormous passion when she described her views of the lockout.

In her mind, the NHL had done all fans wrong by canceling an entire season, depriving fans of their favourite teams. To her a business decision was not an acceptable excuse for causing undue emotional pain on her and other loyal fans of NHL teams. It was interesting to find an equally passionate fan, who found himself on the other end of the spectrum. He was not someone who was happy with the fact that the lockout became a reality and lasted as long as it did, but Ben, saw the outcome as a necessity for the sport.

Well my initial thoughts were, to be honest with you I was totally with the owners' side. And, I think that a lot of the people were too. Realizing that the mentality was that these professional players, not just in hockey, any sport live in a reality that you and I will never know, and their economic structures and the money they make, and they are just not living in reality really. And, it was about time I think that somebody stood up to them and said; enough is enough. The NHL was trying to pay NHL players with an American TV contract that other pro sports have and they don't have it. The NHL is a gate driven league, not a TV driven league like the NFL, the NBA, and MLB. I support the owners...I'm hoping from what it looks like save these small market teams, which we all want to help and see a healthy league. We want to see all the teams competing on an

even keel. It can only help all the teams then. You want to hear about players playing, the stats, and playoff runs. You don't want to hear anymore stuff about the economics of the game. Nobody, general fans don't want to hear that crap, just don't, which is good. That's why I totally supported the owners, and I'm glad they finally stuck with it.

When asked about his thoughts regarding losing an entire season to achieve the new CBA, Ben replied:

I was disappointed with that, I never honestly thought that we would lose a whole NHL season, I didn't think it would happen, I was a little disappointed with that. I thought that they'd be able to get something done before that, but hearing them, Bettman saying if we need to lose an entire season to get this done so be it, but he stuck with it. He said that he was going to get this done, and he did.

Ben felt that as long as there were multi-billionaire owners paying multi-millionaire players, the NHL would remain a business first and foremost. This business philosophy seemed to be disheartening for some fans. Fans would like to see a winner, they were for the most part not concerned with the financial successes of their teams they were concerned with the success on the ice. For example, when asking Toronto Maple Leafs fans about the success of their team they did not talk about the financial successes of the Maple Leafs as one of the most financially successful teams in NHL history, but rather the disappointment of having not won a Stanley Cup since 1967. Twenty-four year-old Josh explained that he wished that they did not run the team as a business, and ran it more like a toy. He made the observation that running it as a business has not worked if you are to consider their lack of success in the pursuit of the Stanley Cup over the years (NHL, 2005).

Who Was to Blame?

As stated in Chapter 1, the findings from the interviews with NHL fans may lead to the uncovering of marketing strategies which will aid to increase the rate at which fans

are drawn fans back to the NHL. As previous researchers have expressed, marketers must uncover the roots of the fans' discontent (Boyd & Krehbiel, 1999; Wakefield, 1995) to develop successful marketing strategies to retain the fans. In order to discover the root of the fans' discontent, if they felt any, each fan was asked if they felt betrayed by any one party or person throughout the lockout. It was interesting to note that some fans were unhappy with the players while others were unhappy with the league itself. There was however, one person in particular who was identified by three of the fans as having the largest portion of blame throughout the entire process. Dave suggested "Goodenow, the player rep I think, I would say was the worst of the bunch, in terms of people who caused the issue." Dave's thoughts were supported by Ben.

Goodenow should have realized that you know that they [NHL executives] are not going to stand down this time, they are going to be sticking it out, and they [NHL executives] were warning them [NHL players] before that it is going to happen. I'm sure the owners talked and owners talked to players, owners talked to agents, I am sure of that and said it is Armageddon, it's happening this time, so I was a little betrayed in that way because it should have been done quicker, that's pretty well how I felt about it.

Bob Goodenow (Executive Director of the NHLPA) was blamed either directly or indirectly by 15 of the 16 fans for the process lasting for as long as it did. He was indirectly blamed when fans reported that the NHLPA was most to blame for the process lasting as long as it did, by Goodenow's position within the union. He was the Executive Director, and by virtue of that position he directed the NHLPA and their stances throughout the process. These 15 fans who believed Goodenow and the players to be more at fault for the length of the lockout was similar to the feelings expressed by fans on the NHLFA (2005) website.

Terry – I guess if I was to point a finger at anyone, I'd probably point it at the players. The reason being, I didn't really know too much about the CBA, I didn't

know what the big problems were, but it seems that the salary cap was a big factor definitely. I mean these guys make more than I'll ever make in a lifetime in one season, and they are complaining about making between six and eight million dollars. Again this is me, but I didn't think that there was a major difference between if you are filthy rich and disgusting rich. So yes in that respect I'm pointing my finger a bit at the players, but I mean both sides are not necessarily equally to blame, but could front some of the blame for sure.

The lack of flexibility within the NHLPA as it pertained to accommodating certain demands of the NHL was hurting the union's image with fans. This was intensified in the stories shared by two business managers who participated in the study.

Managers Side with Management

As could be expected, Victor, a member of the management team for an AAA baseball team, sided with the owners on the issue of the lockout. He explained that management has to deal with many operating costs, not just the players' salaries, and the players had to understand the economics of their sport.

You know, having played sports, having played baseball, I wish that I could have played pro. I'm sure if I was on that side I would want to make as much money as possible, but also being on the management side, you see the real finances, and you're like these guys need to, I think they'll do okay on a million dollars even if they're not making three, I'm sure they'll still be okay with one. You know I would have loved to make any money period playing sports. They just didn't understand, they keep saying that it's about the fans, but they don't get it. The fans were not going to keep paying. Who is going to pay \$75 for a game? You are lucky to get to one game at that point. You want to get to a point to get a family to go to the game ... Tickets have got to come down, if everything comes down you are going to make the same amount anyways. The players needed to, it had to come down. A lot of that was again, they didn't have a big TV contract to pay for things, and they have to know where they stand as far, they're probably under NASCAR. They're probably five or six right now.

With the recent economic develops in North American professional sport, the NHL may no longer be considered one of the top four North American professional sport leagues as it once was (Edge, 2004). Victor compared the NHL's economic status to that of NASCAR. He was able to draw on the fact that the NHL's television ratings continued to

plummet in the years prior to the lockout. The players wanted salaries that were on par with athletes competing in the other major sports leagues, leagues that have larger sources of revenue than that of the NHL (Bannister, 2005).

Jeff, a manager of a scrap metal plant provided another view from the management perspective.

If you were to ask me who I would side with more, it would still be the owners, because when you take any position with any company you understand that it is a business and if the business isn't making money, then restructuring has to be done. It can be layoffs or what not, and it came to the point in the NHL that something had to be done because it was spiraling out of control. So many other major sports leagues have salary caps, and it had to be done for the same reasons, it only made sense. When that became the one and only sticking point, it soured me even more towards the players. I was like come on guys, that's all they're asking. You're not going to be destitute by any means, you have to be fair. And even with the bargaining agreement being written as it was, it still said okay well if everything goes well this year the cap goes up next year, meaning you guys can make more money again. So it might just be a temporary thing, so just work with us rather than against us. It dragged on a lot longer than I thought it should have.

Jeff was calling for the players as Victor had done previously, to understand the economics of their league. They were refusing to accept a deal that, from the fans' perspectives, appeared to be fair to both sides.

The views expressed by the NHL fans interviewed for this study were similar to the results of the survey conducted by Ipsos-Reid and posted by the NHL (2004) that showed 59% of the Canadians polled believed that the owners were being more reasonable, and 16% believed the players were being more reasonable. Of the 16 fans interviewed for the present study, 94% believed the owners were being more reasonable and 6% (one person) believed the players were being more reasonable. It should be noted that the Ipsos-Reid survey (NHL, 2004) took place during the lockout, while interviews for this study took place after the NHL had returned to competition following the lockout.

Personal Impact from the Lockout

The NHL provides a product that affects many individuals on differing levels. There are casual consumers who have just become aware of the NHL and watch games for the entertainment factor. Then there are fans who are both behaviourally and emotionally attached such as those who were interviewed for the study. As explained in the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) (Funk & James, 2001), there are many individuals who fall between these two elements of the continuum as it pertains to the consumption of a sport brand. The individuals who are sometimes forgotten are those who rely on a specific product or brand to enhance the service that they provide.

This was explained by Darryl. His business (sports pub) was directly affected by the lockout. When asked to explain how the lockout affected him personally Darryl presented an interesting recollection of the events, a recollection that could be transferable to many individuals in his position throughout the lockout.

Oh, lost tons of business in the bar. No hockey on, you had to watch poker (laugh). I know it's a big huge thing now, but who wants to watch poker on TV instead of staying at home playing with your buddy. You know that's why poker got so big, is because of the lockout, because there was nothing else to put on the sports channels. You had a choice between poker and a badminton tournament in China, and in North America badminton tournaments don't go over that well. Nothing against badminton, but it's true... Yeah, now I get to watch soap operas on TV, if I want to watch something. I'm not a baseball fan. Football was out at the time, most of it... Money wise, a lot of bars lost a lot of money because of that lockout. Same with a lot of places selling jerseys and stuff, sales went down probably 120%, a lot of places couldn't afford that, and that's not right, with a sport, I can imagine how many businesses went under because of the lockout. And that's just not fair to the common man, and the community.

The impact for Darryl from a financial standpoint was similar to the story of a Rochester-based sausage maker who was negatively impacted by the NHL lockout

(Kompos, 2004). Similar to Darryl's situation, the sausage maker's revenues were reduced with the absence of the NHL. Many NHL fans consume food while they consume the NHL product (Kompos, 2004), and with the absence of the NHL comes a decrease in the consumption of food and beverages in Darryl's case.

It is interesting to note that shortly after conducting this interview, Darryl sold his share of the pub to take a new position with a larger bar located in the downtown area of Calgary. The financial impact of the lockout caused enormous changes to occur with the pub. Darryl was not in favour of some of the changes and took a position with a bar located on the "Red Mile" in Calgary.

The "Red Mile" is located on 17th Street in Calgary. This area became famous during the 2004 Calgary Flames playoff run as fans poured into the street to celebrate each win (The Red Mile, 2006). The "Red Mile" is home to many local businesses including some of Calgary's most well known bars.

Anticipated Reaction to the Return of the NHL Prior to July 22, 2005

Friday July 22, 2005 marked the end of the NHL lockout. The NHL was going to hold one of the most anticipated rookie drafts in its existence, with the player who many predicted (Farber, 2005; Gillis, 2005; TSN, 2005) to be the next great player of the NHL, Sidney Crosby, and the most frenzied free agent signing period in the history of the NHL. However, through the entire period of the lockout, fans were creating their own perceptions of how they anticipated reacting to the return of the NHL once the lockout had been resolved. Cunningham and Kwon (2003) found that there is a positive relationship between intentions to attend a hockey game and previous behaviours, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Thus, the fans were asked

how they expected to react to the return of the NHL. When asked to explain their anticipated reactions prior July 22, 2005 when the fans knew that the NHL and NHLPA had come to an agreement, six of the 16 fans stated that they anticipated watching less NHL hockey than they had prior to the lockout.

Jeff - I thought honestly, partially maybe because of the media hype that I was going to be turned off, and think you know what, how can you expect me to come back and watch the game and enjoy the game as much as I did before, when you know you sat idle for 18 months or whatever, but again it was from being bashed over the head I think that everyone said oh this is wrong and the fans aren't going to come back and if they do they are going to in drabs and groves and it is going to take years to rebuild the fan base. I was hit with a bat, and if you're hit over the head enough times with a bat you tend to believe things, and that is what I thought that it would be like.

Jeff's statement was interesting for several reasons. Many fans did anticipate reacting negatively towards the return of the NHL, but at the same time it may have been because this reaction was identified and reinforced by the media (NHL, 2004; NHLFA, 2004; TSN, 2005). There were other fans who echoed these sentiments, and even more who anticipated reacting negatively for other reasons. For example, Sarah explained,

When I was sitting at the OHL (Ontario Hockey League) games I was like well this is so much better, I'm going to come to these games and screw you NHL, but that's just emotions speaking when you are mad at someone. So I anticipated being a little mad ...

Sarah had found alternative methods of hockey consumption. She anticipated a continued consumption of the OHL brand, rather than the NHL. The NHL had alienated her, and she anticipated that she would alienate them in return.

Wes shared less of an overall negative view of the lockout, but rather he was extremely skeptical with how he was going to react to rule changes that were going to accompany the return of the NHL. According to him, the NHL officials charged with

improving game play had forgotten what it was all about, hockey is a sport played by athletes, not by businessmen.

I thought that they were just trying to make it a product that was the most entertaining instead of staying true to the sport, so I figured, well obviously it was a business decision, but trying to get as many fans as possible through entertainment rather than through what most dedicated hockey fans would say are the roots of the sport.

Wes was now seeing the NHL alienate him in two ways. The NHL executives and players had taken away the product that he loved to consume, and now they were discussing taking away the game of hockey as he knew it. Wes feels that he is a traditionalist, he loves hockey at its roots. He enjoys watching the skilled players attempt to beat the defensive players. For him, it is a battle of offense and defense. He was worried that the NHL was going to force hockey to become a game that was focused on offensive play.

For the six fans who reported that they anticipated reacting negatively to the return to the NHL they were met by 10 of the 16 fans who claimed they could not wait for NHL hockey to return and would not feel any negative emotions towards the league. This was evidenced by Erica.

I knew that no matter what I was going to be excited. It is just something that was going to be either this year or next, but I couldn't wait until they got back. A lot of people who I knew were like, we're not going to watch it, and I was like, good for you I am. To me it didn't seem to affect them anyways. I don't know anybody who's not talked about hockey or watched it. I knew that I would be back.

The same was reported by Darryl, a man who was impacted financially by the lockout yet he too could not wait for them to return. Darryl was impacted negatively in his life with his business losing money during the lockout; however he did not anticipate harbouring any negative emotions for the NHL. He never once thought that the lockout

would disrupt his consumption of the NHL, “Any bad feelings? No. I was just so glad that they got back.” While interviewing Nick, it became clear that his sentiments were similar to those expressed by Darryl. “I knew that I would welcome them back with open arms that’s for sure, because I missed it so much ... I didn’t have hard feelings.”

The anticipated reactions were interesting to hear. It was divided between the fans who were skeptical and anticipated reacting negatively to the return, and those who expected to be so ecstatic that they would completely forget what they had experienced during the lockout. The investigation of anticipated reactions is interesting, however the NHL was concerned with the actual reactions that the fans would have upon their return (Pollack, 2005). The NHL needed to have fans return to the consumption practices that they had prior to the lockout, because they could not afford a decrease in popularity in North America. The NHL needed to provide a form of service recovery.

Alternative Hockey Consumption

Work that has been done concerning fans’ reactions to work stoppages in professional sport have dealt with marketing strategies and promotional tools to minimize the negative effects that the work stoppage will have on attendance levels (Boyd & Krehbiel, 1999; Wakefield, 1995). This was determined to be the focal point of sport marketers who were reintroducing a sport brand to the fans. How can we reduce the negative influences caused by the work stoppage on future consumption? They did not discuss what alternative forms of consumption the fans may have considered, that could in turn affect their future consumption of the particular brand.

Service providers are constantly battling for a consumer’s disposable income. Previous literature has tended to focus on strategies to have consumers regain their

previous consumption practices, rather than acknowledge that the leagues were going to have to compete with alternative service providers. As a service provider you are constantly in competition with other companies for the consumer's disposable income. The NHL is not only in competition with other sporting leagues, but they are in competition with other forms of entertainment such as movies, video games, and concerts. It has been demonstrated throughout the interviews conducted for this study that the fans had attached themselves to alternative forms of hockey competition. The lockout created a reality in which the NHL is now competing even more so with amateur hockey and other professional hockey leagues for the disposable income and free time of their fans.

An interesting finding that emerged from the interviews conducted in the present study was that fans chose to follow alternative forms of hockey competition in the absence of the NHL. Thirty-nine year-old Darryl expressed that he would take hockey in any form available to him. Darryl reported to follow any hockey competition that was available on his satellite at his pub.

It was discovered that fans followed other forms of hockey, because they needed hockey in their lives. It could be presumed that the NHL should have expected to have to compete with these alternative leagues, yet there was no literature found that dealt with alternative forms of consumption that became prevalent when the brand was not available. It could be presumed that the fans only have so much time allotted to devote to the consumption of the sport, and if they had developed an attachment to an alternative form of consumption other than their favourite NHL team, they may only be able to devote half their time to the NHL team and half to the alternative form of consumption

upon the resolution of the lockout. Ben stated it best “I need my hockey fix”. He shared stories of becoming fully entrenched with his local Junior A team.

What happened was, I found other things to do. I’ll be honest with you. We have our local junior team, the Raiders. Last year, it’s funny the year that there was a lockout they happened to have a run, and they were the host of the Ontario finals, so it worked out well ... So me and my buddies followed the Raiders, we went to home games, we went to playoff games, we went to away games, we followed them everywhere – all the way on the run, right to the finals. It is ironic that they ended up playing the St. Mike’s Buzzers in the finals, and with it being a lockout year, we had half of the NHL people who were at the Georgetown arena, that was big news, a big deal for us. You had Bob McKenzie, Geno Reda, Brian Burke, Rick Vaive, all these ex-NHL type of people who were all in our arena watching the St Mike’s team play against Georgetown, because they had spare time too. And, our team went all the way on to win the Ontario final, it was quite exciting. You know, it replaced not having NHL hockey, that was how I replaced it...Latching on to a local team and becoming that attached to it was definitely a replacement. It was more than enough for us, when you get into the Junior A in the playoffs, as you know they are pretty much playing every other night too. So if we were not at home or getting a night off, we were going to Aurora, or wherever they were to follow them around, so it was more than enough to replace it.

Ben had actually referred to the Raiders as being a replacement to his Maple Leafs. It was interesting to find that a Junior A team could evoke a similar amount of passion in a team that he had followed since he was a child.

It was interesting to find that the fans’ consumption practices of these alternative forms of hockey have reduced since the return of the NHL. The fans reported to have returned to watching their favourite NHL teams with relatively similar frequency as prior to the lockout. However, Ben reported that he has not followed the Maple Leafs with the same frequency as prior to the lockout. The reason is that he started coaching his daughter’s hockey team during the lockout, because he had spare time on his hands. He has developed such a passion with coaching and bond with his daughter that her hockey takes precedence even after the return of the NHL. He does continue to watch all Maple

Leafs games when they do not conflict with his daughter's hockey games. When there is a conflict, he chooses to coach his daughter's team, and consumes the Maple Leafs using another medium, such as newspapers.

The lockout opened Ben's eyes to coaching. He would not have considered it prior to the NHL lockout, because he did not have the time. He was so devoted to the Maple Leafs that he could not miss a game prior to the lockout. The void of time that was introduced in Ben's life with the absence of the NHL quickly became filled with various forms of consumption. He is an example of a loyal consumer who was forced to find alternative forms of consumption, and upon the return of the NHL could not simply return to his previous consumption practices with the NHL, because the NHL was now competing with time he had allotted to his daughter.

The London Knights

The London Knights are a franchise that competes in the Western Conference of the Ontario Hockey League (OHL). The OHL is a Junior A level of competition with players ranging from the ages of 16 to 21, with a few exceptions. The OHL is one of three leagues that comprise the Canadian Hockey League (CHL). These three leagues follow a similar set of regulations, but are divided by geography. The three champions of each individual league (along with the host franchise) meet each spring to compete for the Memorial Cup, to crown the champion of the CHL (London Knights, 2006).

The city of London is located half way between Toronto and Windsor, Ontario, Canada. In the spring of 2005 the London Knights capped off arguably the most successful season in CHL history with a Memorial Cup victory (CHL championship). The Knights registered a 79-9-2 record in the 2004-2005 season, including OHL and

CHL playoffs (London Knights, 2006). The Knights began the campaign with the longest unbeaten streak in CHL history at 31 games. They were a team that benefited from the NHL lockout, because many of their players were already drafted into the NHL, and could have been playing in the NHL that season.

Fourteen of the fans who were interviewed in the present investigation were from the South Western and Southern Ontario regions, and were saturated with London Knights's reports, highlights, and broadcasts in the media. Once it became apparent that fans searched for alternative forms of hockey consumption, it was interesting to find that six of the fans reported to following the London Knights throughout this historic run.

Nick explained that the Knights took over from the Maple Leafs for him in terms of attachment. He continued with the same behaviours he had with the Maple Leafs, but he transferred those behaviours to the London Knights.

Thank God for the Knights though. They saved hockey for sure the season that the lockout happened, because they were so dominant of a team, with a London team in my home town so watching them play on TV and watching them live at the John Labatt Centre. So that was really good...I guess basically every time that they were on TV, I'd watch them on TV or live, look at the paper to see how they did the night before.

When asked if Nick's consumption behaviours were different from previous years, when the NHL was in competition, Nick responded.

I watched them the odd time, but not as much as the year of the lockout. Plus the team that they had was just a phenomenal team, all NHL quality players. It was basically like watching an NHL team play. The whole OHL was like that that year. All the draft picks were still around instead of in the NHL.

Nick explained that he transferred his attachment to the Maple Leafs to the London Knights for this one year of competition. He reported to following the Knights in the same methods that he would have followed the Maple Leafs. He read the newspaper and

watched them on television, the same as he would do for the Maple Leafs, however the one difference was that he did not follow them as much on the internet as he would the Maple Leafs.

Darren came to a similar realization as Nick. He realized that the fact that the NHL was not competing during the 2004-2005 season did not affect him, because he had an alternative to which he felt an attachment that replaced the NHL for him. Darren had considered himself a loyal fan of both the Columbus Blue Jackets and the London Knights; teams that are in two different leagues, and competing at two different age and skill levels. The Blue Jackets were more available to Darren because he had satellite television and was able to watch all of their games prior to the lockout. However, with the absence of the NHL, OHL hockey became readily available on sport networks as opposed to previous years. This provided Darren with a more than acceptable substitution for NHL hockey, "I didn't miss hockey at all during the lockout, because we had the London Knights ... I pretty much just watched Knights's games instead of NHL games."

Darren followed the Knights from the beginning of the season until their Memorial Cup victory. He shared stories of taking in the game at the "Party Zone" located in downtown London with friends. The whole city came together to cheer on the team and that was more than an adequate replacement for the Columbus Blue Jackets for him.

The consumption of the London Knights as alternatives to NHL competition was not restricted solely to London natives. Terry, a resident of a Toronto suburb stated that the London Knights had always been his favourite OHL team, even though he grew up closer to Sarnia, a city with its own OHL team. Terry explained that he followed the

Knights's progress with increased frequency over their record setting season, "With the Knights doing well, they were my favourite OHL team from way back when", he was able to somewhat replace the loss of his Maple Leafs by following the London Knights.

Although the London Knights were chosen to replace the NHL product for a number of fans, it is interesting to note that a majority of the fans have continued to follow the Knights after the return of the NHL, but the fans all reported to follow them with a decreased frequency.

The Poker Sensation

An example of an alternative form of consumption that is now challenging the NHL for the fans' attention is poker. The poker sensation was identified by several fans to have taken the place of NHL throughout the lockout. Erica would get together with friends to play poker on Saturdays. Saturdays were traditionally devoted to Hockey Night in Canada for Erica. As the lockout was taking place, Erica filled the void in her life with poker. Ben reported a similar story. He said that poker nights replaced hockey nights for him and his friends. Loyal consumers of the NHL were now spending their disposable income that once went to NHL purchases on poker.

Habib (2005) argued that the online poker wave has reached the college campuses across North America. He explained that there are many young men and women who are earning large sums of money and conversely losing large sums of money playing poker. I bring attention to this article, because there were a number of young participants in the present study. Fifteen of the 16 fans were under the age of 40, and many were recent graduates of college and/or university. At the time of the lockout, Erica herself was in the final year of her college experience. Her and many of her college friends used poker as a

means to replace the NHL. As the NHL returned to play, the league had to compete with poker for individuals' disposable income.

It was found in this study that since the return of the NHL poker has not appeared to be the great competitor to the league. Both Erica and Ben stated that since the NHL had returned, they have decreased their poker participation. Erica has returned with complete devotion to her Toronto Maple Leafs. Others however, have reported their ongoing participation in poker events, in some cases during televised NHL games in the background. This was reported by Darren, as well as Rich. Both expressed that the NHL took precedence for them over the poker game, but many of their friends continued to be consumed with the poker craze, and they too enjoyed playing when they could, but poker would not replace their bond with the NHL.

Being a Fan after the Lockout

In this study, six individuals believed that they would follow the NHL with less frequency and a decreased level of attachment once the labour dispute ended. Those predictions were then compared to actual consumption practices as reported by the fans who were interviewed. These consumption practices are presented in the following sections.

The Service Recovery

The service failure and recovery literature suggested that consumers can accept that service failures occur. The consumers however, expect that the service provider will implement a service recovery strategy, one that uses all the resources available to the provider (Holloway & Beatty; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003; McCollough, Berry, & Yadav, 2000; Smith & Bolton, 1998). In the case of the 2004-2005 NHL lockout, there

were two triggers as presented by McColl-Kennedy and Sparks (2003) for the service failure: (a) there were problems with the NHL product and services associated with it and (b) there were problems associated with the NHL and the NHLPA. Several fans including Dave noted that the lockout was not a surprise, "it's not like nobody saw it coming or that it was a big surprise that it came." The fans had been informed throughout the media of an impending lockout for over a year.

To this point, the NHL lockout mirrored the service failure/recovery literature (Holloway & Beatty; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003; McCollough, Berry, & Yadav, 2000; Smith & Bolton, 1998). The NHL had advised fans that the lockout was a possibility and/or likelihood. They did not hide the looming lockout from their fans. According to the literature (Holloway & Beatty; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003; McCollough, Berry, & Yadav, 2000; Smith & Bolton, 1998) in order for the NHL to avoid service failure, they needed to start negotiating with the NHLPA immediately and show their fans that they were serious about resolving the issue. According to fans, such as Chuck, the NHL and NHLPA did not give the impression that they were working to resolve the issue. Chuck felt that the two sides' lack of communication was the most frustrating aspect of the lockout. He understood that the lockout was going to happen however, he could not understand why the two sides would not get together to attempt to come to a resolution.

The lack of communication was in direct opposition to the suggestions of McCollough, Berry, and Yadav (2000). They had argued that a service provider should strive to offer high-recovery performance when dealing with a service failure. The constant power struggle between both sides of the issue was perceived to be anything but

a path towards a recovery strategy. The fans were becoming increasingly dissatisfied by what they viewed to be remedial attempts to resolve the lockout. Chuck suggested that, as a fan, he was not given the impression that the two sides recognized a need to resolve the lockout in a timely fashion. It was perceived by most fans to be the players and their association that held up the negotiations. There were not many reasons given for this perception, other than the fans perceived that the players knew that the owners wanted a salary cap, and that they would not settle for anything less. The fans tended to side with the owners. As Ben suggested, the fans had accepted that the salary cap was inevitable and he did not understand how the players and their association believed that they could keep it out of the new CBA. Ben did not perceive the NHL and NHLPA to be using all the resources available to them to resolve the lockout. Similar to participants in the service failure/recovery studies, he did not perceive the two sides to be doing all they could to resolve the issue, and resulted in him being unhappy with the two sides (Holloway & Beatty; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003; McCollough, Berry, & Yadav, 2000; Smith & Bolton, 1998).

The NHL and NHLPA were in danger of alienating a majority of their fan base. Holloway and Beatty (2003) suggested that a majority of consumers' future consumption practices are affected by a negative experience, and that over a third of consumers who they surveyed would never again purchase from the company responsible for their negative experience. In this study, the two sides in the negotiations apparently had forgotten that they still needed the fans to purchase tickets, merchandise, and cable packages to name a few. The two sides were proceeding down a path that could result in fans consuming the NHL with less frequency. They had been responsible for a service

failure, and they were not investing the time in negotiations to resolve the issue. Based on Smith and Bolton (1998), one could predict that this would result in lower consumption upon the return of the product.

In the end, the NHL and NHLPA were able to come to a resolution, agreeing to a new CBA, but as explained by the interviewed fans, the two sides did not come to this resolution in an optimal manner. Yet, the fans reported that for the most part their consumption had increased following the lockout. In the next section, the 'new' NHL is addressed.

The New NHL

If comparing the NHL's recovery strategies to the strategies suggested in the service recovery literature (Holloway & Beatty; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003; McCollough, Berry, & Yadav, 2000; Smith & Bolton, 1998), owners and players dealt with the lockout improperly. Fans who were interviewed for this study also shared these views. There were a number of fans who predicted that they would not return to normal consumption practices once the NHL resumed, because they were feeling alienated by the league and in particular by the players. As McColl-Kennedy and Sparks (2003) would suggest, NHL owners and players were failing in their delivery of service to their consumers, the fans. They were not demonstrating to their fans that they were working towards a resolution and they were definitely not using all of their resources to solve the labour dispute.

According to the fans, what the NHL did properly was that they marketed the game extensively prior to the beginning of the 'new' season, and they introduced a number of changes proposed by Brendan Shanahan and the members of his competition

committee which included three other players, three general managers, one owner, and one NHL executive (Colin Campbell, Executive Vice President and Director of Hockey Operations for the NHL). The competition committee was assembled to propose changes to the game play rules adhered to by the NHL, with the purpose of improving the game, and increasing the speed of the game (NHL, 2005). Dave explained that he remained indifferent to the return of the NHL just as he had to the lockout when it happened, until he heard of all the critical events that were about to happen. More specifically, before the post-lockout season started, teams were going to experience a lottery draft to determine which place they would draft, a buy-out period in which teams could purchase the contract of players they no longer wanted on their roster, and a free agency period unlike previous free agency periods. Dave described how teams such as Columbus were now able to attract and sign the free agents that teams such as Toronto and Detroit coveted.

Darren, a Columbus Blue Jackets fan, spoke of his team having the ability to attract Adam Foote, one of the most talented defenseman who was available in this free agency period. Adam Foote, a long standing member of the Colorado Avalanche, a large market team, chose to play for the Blue Jackets, and shortly after was named their captain. Adam Foote is one example of the change in the new NHL, a league in which the small markets were now on a level playing field with large market teams.

The NHL marketing and publicity strategies that were created prior to the 2005-06 season aided the fans to move past the lockout and resume their consumption of the product. The NHL had fans consume at levels higher than prior to the lockout. The league is actually experiencing increased revenues (NHL, 2005). Smith and Bolton (1998) stated that consumers would increase their previous consumption if they deemed

that the service recovery exceeded their expectations. The behaviours of owners and players did not exceed the fans' expectations throughout the negotiation process, however the product on the ice is now considered to be of better quality than the product prior to the lockout thus resulting in increased consumption of the product by fans.

Each of the fans who were interviewed for this study suggested that the new rules implemented in the NHL this season have been favourable for the game. A brief summary of the rule changes include: changing the dimensions of the rink, removing the red line, reducing the size of goaltenders' equipment, restricting the puck playing of goaltenders, implementing the shootout in cases of ties at the end of games, tag up offside rule, and changing of the instigator rule (NHL, 2005). All of these changes were implemented after the lockout to increase the flow of play. For the most part, the fans agreed that the rule changes have improved the NHL product, and for that reason they have reported to consume more NHL than they did prior to the lockout.

The lockout provides evidence that although the initial service recovery was deemed not acceptable by the fans, an organization may be able to nullify those negative effects by providing a service recovery strategy later in the process that exceeds the expectations of consumers.

The implementation of the new NHL as a service recovery strategy is much different from the approach that the MLB took upon their return to game play in the spring of 1995. MLB returned to play with replacement players, a lesser product from the one they offered the previous year with major league players. Once the players agreed to a contract and returned to play, the league continued to suffer in terms of revenue generation. MLB did not implement strategies other than promotional giveaways to spike

fans' weaning interest in the league. It took until the homerun showdown of 1998 between Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa for fans' interest to return to levels prior to the labour dispute.

These two cases, the 2004-2005 NHL lockout and the MLB strike of 1994, may provide evidence that the optimal service recovery strategy in sports is to enhance the product that you are offering. The NHL fans interviewed have all reported to enjoy the new NHL. Their feelings of ill will that some had expected to harbour towards the league and/or players have dissipated. In a very different case, MLB fans returned to the stadium in the season of 1998, when the race for homeruns between Sosa and McGwire took place. Although the MLB were not proactive in an innovative service recovery strategy, the homerun race, in the eyes of fans, increased the appeal of the game.

Small Market Teams

The second research question for this study aimed to uncover whether the lockout experience differed for fans of small market teams versus large market teams. This research question stemmed from previous research dealing with strong and weak brands (Baldinger & Robinson, 1996; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) provided examples of the disadvantages that weak brands have as opposed to strong markets in tangible sales. Small market teams in the NHL experience those same disadvantages, such as they have relatively small populations to draw their fan base from, and secondly that individuals in that population tend to purchase tickets less frequently (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). It was difficult for small market teams to compete with the larger markets that had much larger pools of fans from which to draw from (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

The salary cap was implemented to increase parity in the NHL, allowing the small market teams to compete with large market teams, such as the Detroit Red Wings, Toronto Maple Leafs, and Philadelphia Flyers. Dave felt that fan interest was declining in the past, because if you were a fan of a small market team, you never felt like you could compete with large market teams in the free agency market. He explained that this had changed with the implementation of the cap.

Fan interest kind of waned in it because people in the smaller markets like Edmonton and Calgary never hoped that we could get this guy, where at least now if your team has enough room under the cap it has an equal shot of getting the player, so that kind of equals it out.

Jeff shared an example of a small market team that has excelled under the new CBA in its first year, “It makes it easier for small market teams, Carolina this year to compete.” At the time of the interview with Jeff, the Carolina Hurricanes were in first place in the Eastern Conference of the NHL. Carolina had struggled in the past couple of years prior to the lockout. However, during this season they were able to add quality players prior to the trade deadline such as Doug Weight and Mark Recchi. These are moves that would have been difficult for Carolina to make prior to the implementation of the new CBA. The Hurricanes were historically “sellers” at the trade deadline, rather than “buyers.” This is a new situation for the NHL, one with parity, one that allows small market teams to compete on a level playing ground with the large market teams.

It was reported by Farber (2006) that Gary Bettman has been perceived as a hero in some NHL small markets. “[Bettman] was rewarded with allies on both personal and professional levels. On one occasion, Bettman was reported signing autographs outside of the Oilers’s arena (Farber, 2006). Edmonton was staunchly pro-lockout, viewing a cap as the only possibility its franchise had of getting back in the game” (Farber, 2006, p. 57).

Farber (2006) was suggesting that the lockout experience did differ for fans of small market teams.

In response to the research question, each of the 16 fans believed that the new CBA was beneficial to the league as a whole. Throughout the interviews, fans suggested that the new CBA brought parity throughout the league and allowed small market teams to compete with large markets teams. Wes and Darren were the only two fans of what they described as small market teams, yet they did not live in these markets. The accounts of their experiences of the lockout did not differ from the experiences reported by the remaining 14 fans. However, the implementation of the new CBA has resulted in a rejuvenation of their faith in the league and their favourite teams. The ability for Wes's Calgary Flames and Darren's Columbus Blue Jackets to compete for free agents with the large market teams has resulted in a higher sense of allegiance for these two individuals as it pertains to their fandom.

Four of eight Toronto Maple Leafs fans who were interviewed reported that their sense of allegiance has decreased since the lockout, due to the Maple Leafs's lack of success post-lockout. This finding is in direct contradiction to Baldinger and Robinson's (1996) suggestion that strong market brands were able to retain highly loyal consumers better than weak markets. The Toronto Maple Leafs, a perennial playoff team, did not make the playoffs in the first year of the new CBA. Their lack of success throughout the season resulted in the loss of interest in the team from the fans who were interviewed for the study.

Consumption Practices of the NHL as a League

It was common for fans to describe their consumption of the NHL as having increased in frequency relative to prior to the lockout. Each of the 16 fans reported their increased enjoyment of the new NHL product versus the product prior to the lockout, and as a result the consumption of the NHL as a whole increased for 14 of the 16 fans (Juanita and Erica's remained the same). The NHL worked to increase the speed of the game by decreasing the number of stoppages in play. Two fans who reported to be losing interest in the NHL as a league prior to the lockout, Dave and Jeff suggested that the improved on ice product led to their increased consumption of the league upon its return.

Dave - I watch it more than I used to, a lot more. Simply because of the interest that was developed before and the product that they put on the ice once they started playing again.

Jeff - Way more! Partially because I think that it is a better game without the clutching and grabbing, the rule changes that they implemented helped speed it up. Some people say that they don't like it, there are too many penalties. But it is a nice wide open game, fun to watch. I think that it was a case of 'absence makes the heart grow fonder'. When you don't have the regularity of turning on the TV and catching the five minutes of hockey and saying I've seen enough I want to watch something else now, it kind of made me appreciate something I didn't have for a while.

As for the attachment that these two felt for the NHL, it also increased after the lockout.

When asked about their attachment levels to the NHL Dave and Jeff responded correspondingly:

Dave – More, simply because I'm more aware of the league and what's going on around them.

Jeff - The NHL however, definitely a lot more. I do check the stats on NHL.com pretty much daily just to see who's doing what, I listen to the radio, FAN590 to catch the NHL blabbering and everything else. I think that I'm a lot more attached to it now, maybe it's because I am devoid of any other content to fill it, I don't know.

It was interesting to note that these two fans who had voiced their displeasure with the NHL as a league prior to the lockout felt that they were more attached upon its return, because the NHL's product exceeded their expectations. The same could not be said for several of the fans who viewed themselves as extremely attached to the league prior to the lockout. The consumption practices for 14 of the fans did increase, however Sarah and Terry reported that their attachment levels for the league had decreased. Sarah believed that it was a result of how the situation was handled that had caused her attachment level with the NHL to decrease, and Terry reported that starting a new profession may have led to his decreased attachment to the league.

Eight of the fans reported feeling more attached to the NHL as a league than they had prior to the lockout, and there were two who reported to feel less attached, while six reported to have the same level of attachment for the league as they had prior to the lockout. Those who reported feeling more attached fell with Smith and Bolton's (1998) definition of consumers who had their expectations of a service recovery exceeded. The six who reported having the same attachment level were indifferent to the service recovery strategy, while Sarah and Terry could not regain the attachment levels that they felt prior to the lockout. The following section addresses the fans' consumption practices and attachment levels to their favourite team following the lockout.

Consumption Practices of the Fans' with their Favourite Teams

Thirteen of the 16 fans reported that their levels of attachment to their favourite teams were as high as they felt possible prior to the lockout, and upon the return of the NHL, 11 of the 13 (Ben and Josh being the exceptions) reported their attachment levels to their favourite NHL teams were still equal to their reported levels prior to the lockout.

Rich explained that his levels of attachment to the Canadiens remained the same as they were prior to the lockout. Upon the return of the NHL, Rich invested in the Centre Ice Package (paid subscription to a majority of televised NHL games) so that he could consume an increased level of Montréal Canadiens televised games. However, even though his financial investment towards the consumption of the Montréal Canadiens increased [Centre Ice Package] in the return of the NHL, he explained that he would not consider his level of attachment to the team to have increased.

I'd say that it's the same. I'd say that's how it is for all fans who follow their teams pretty closely. I'd watch them in French, and I don't understand French, now I just get to understand what they are saying.

Throughout the process Jeff maintained his level of attachment to the Montréal Canadiens. Funk and James (2001) suggested that fans can move up and down the Psychological Continuum Model. It could be presumed that the hiatus from competition for a prolonged period of time could result in a fan becoming less attached to his/her favourite team, yet 14 of the 16 reported their attachment levels to their favourite team to have either remained identical or to have increased. Dave reported that he feels closer to the Montréal Canadiens now, after the lockout. The reason is not because he has increased his consumption of the Canadiens, but rather that he has increased his consumption of the rest of the NHL, making him feel like he understands the competition of which his team is part.

I'm more attached to the NHL itself, because of a lot of what I just said, the product they have on the ice and the parity ... Maybe a little more, simply because I'm more aware of the league and what's going on around them ... I pay attention to them, but when they are playing a game against Phoenix I know that it should be a good game, or some other team, where before I just kind of paid attention to them, if they won I was happy and if they didn't I wasn't.

Dave felt that his new found holistic appreciation of the NHL as a league has actually increased his attachment to his favourite team. Being aware of the Canadiens surroundings (other NHL teams) gives Dave a greater appreciation for his favourite team.

As there were fans such as Dave who reported their attachment levels to their favourite team to have increased since the end of the lockout, there were also fans who reported their levels to have decreased, such as Ben. Ben feels that the lockout opened his eyes to alternative activities in life that could take the place of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Ben is now a coach on his daughter's hockey team and this takes precedence over the Maple Leafs's games when they are in conflict. Ben does explain that his attachment to the Maple Leafs may be diminishing in part because of the Maple Leafs's poor record this season, but while his attachment to the Leafs is decreasing, his attachment to the NHL has increased.

It's gone down a little bit, I guess because I'm a Leafs's fan more when they are doing well. When they are doing awful, you can only watch so many awful games in a row, being a Leafs' fan or not. But, I enjoy watching the NHL a little more, because the game is better. You can see the Crosby's and the Ovechkin's in the game like last night, and it's free wheeling, they have a chance to move out there, these skilled players. I'm interested more to watch other teams play now, because of the way the NHL has gone now...It is a combination of the rule changes and the Leafs just being an awful team. Combination of both.

It was interesting to note that the success of the fans' favourite teams affected their attachment to the team. It was found that Canadiens's and Sabres's fans had begun to lose interest in the NHL prior to the lockout, and these were teams that had experienced several years of poor performances prior to the lockout. Since the return of the NHL these teams have experienced some success, and their fans report being more attached to the NHL. Maple Leafs's fans tended to be highly attached to the team and the league prior to the lockout, when Toronto had a perennial playoff team. The first season

under the new CBA, saw Toronto miss the playoffs, and in turn three of the eight Toronto Maple Leafs's fans (Ben, Terry, and Josh) reported that they were now less attached to their favourite team as compared to prior to the lockout.

Experiences Summary

The interviews allowed for an examination of the fans' experiences as they fell into the four dimensions under study: becoming a fan, being a fan prior to the lockout, being a fan during the lockout including the fans' perceived relationship with the NHL upon the completion of the lockout, and the fans' actual relationship after the lockout. The 16 fans who were interviewed provided both distinctly unique as well as shared accounts of their experiences which led to the development of themes which were presented throughout the past chapter. The 2004-2005 NHL lockout was a reality for fans of the league, one that they were forced to face. None of the 16 fans who were interviewed felt that the lockout was going to be a positive when it first occurred, but each of the 16 fans reported to enjoy the new product and new business structure of the league which promoted parity that accompanied the return of the NHL to competition, and marked the end of the longest work stoppage in North American professional sport history.

CHAPTER 6

Summary

Friday July 22, 2005 marked the end of the 301-day lockout that cost the NHL and their fans an entire NHL season. The stakeholder that provides perhaps the most interesting take on the lockout, because they had nothing to gain other than the ability to follow the teams that they have grown to love is the fans. For that reason, this study asked loyal fans of the NHL to explain the phenomenon as they experienced it, and how it affected them.

To summarize, the 16 fans who were interviewed indicated that the lockout season of 2004-2005 did have a direct effect on their lives. The fans noted that they were forced to live without their NHL. The fans enjoyed the competition and the bond that they shared with their favourite team. Yet the lockout season posed an abnormality in their experience of being a fan of the NHL, they were forced to be fans without the luxury of competition. For the most part the fans indicated that the lockout was a negative experience, however they reported to be just as attached, if not more attached to their favourite teams and the NHL itself since the conclusion of the lockout. The fans did blame both sides for the lockout however they did not blame both sides equally. For the most part the fans did believe a larger portion of the blame laid in the hands of the players. The players were viewed by 15 of the 16 fans to be the side that caused the lockout to continue as long as it did.

Similar to what was found in previous fan behaviour literature (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann, et al., 1996), a majority of the fans indicated that they were introduced to the NHL and their favourite team by a family member. Half of the

participants (8) indicated that their fathers were the most important socializing agents in their fandom of the NHL. What an interesting finding was that mothers were reported to be the most influential socializing agents by a quarter (4) of the fans who were interviewed. Previous fan behaviour literature (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000) has indicated mothers to be socializing agents, however none of these studies indicated that mothers were as influential as they were reported to be in the present study. Cultural influences were also indicated to be the most influential socializing agent by two of the fans. Hockey and the NHL are staples in Canadian culture, and two of the fans were unable to pinpoint the time in their lives when they became fans of the NHL. The best way that they could describe their initial attachment with the NHL was as a Canadian birthright.

With all of the fans who participated in the study being over the age of 21 they had all experienced the lockout of 1994-1995 which cost the league half of their season. Fans expected the process in 2004-2005 to be much the same as the lockout that occurred 10 years earlier. As the 2004-2005 lockout continued to linger, fans realized that this was not going to be the lockout of 1994-1995. The owners were not going to give in this time a salary cap was going to come out of these negotiations. Fans quickly realized that there was a void in their life without the NHL for them to consume. They had free time that needed to be filled. Many of the fans reported to latching onto amateur and/or junior hockey teams. The fans reported that they attached themselves with these teams just as they would with their favourite NHL team. Alternative hockey consumption became a replacement for NHL action for many of the fans. Others reported to immerse themselves in the poker craze. Hockey nights were soon replaced by poker nights. The common

finding in all of these cases was that once the NHL returned a majority of the fans returned to their normal NHL consumption practices, and for many a higher rate of NHL consumption.

The fans were eager to satisfy their appetite for hockey, and in junior hockey competition they were finding hockey at its roots. Hockey was still fun for these players, these young men who were playing for the passion of hockey, not necessarily for the big contract. Fans reported that the NHL was becoming a business, and the lockout simply made those who did not understand the evolution of professional sports aware of the fact that it was no longer about the love of the game, but it was about the business. It was perhaps most apparent for fans of the Toronto Maple Leafs. These fans reported that the “good old days” existed within the friendly confines of Maple Leaf Gardens. The move to the Air Canada Centre represented the end of an era, and the beginning of a new one. The new era is now characterized to be about business and revenue generation, not the passion of the sport.

For that reason, it may have been predictable to find that the fans interviewed in the study would agree with a salary cap strategy that will enable the league to ensure that all of the franchises are on an equal playing ground. This was in fact what was found. The fans understood that there was a need for a salary cap. They believed a salary cap would lead to parity throughout the league. They did not want the rich teams to get richer and the poor teams to get poorer. The salary cap was reported by the media to be the major source of conflict between the league and the players, this in turn was the main reason why the fans tended to side with the owners rather than the players.

Upon agreeing to the new collective bargaining agreement, the NHL understood that the league was going to experience opposition by some fans, due to the alienation that they felt throughout the lockout season. Gary Bettman, the Commissioner of the NHL understood that his office was going to be mandated with implementing marketing strategies to reduce the negative effects that could linger from the lockout. The office of the NHL implemented various marketing strategies to thank the fans for coming back to the NHL arenas. Yet the strategy that proved to be the most effective, and perhaps the best service recovery strategy that they could have implemented was introducing the new NHL rule changes. They went above and beyond what the fans expected them to do by providing them with a more enjoyable product, one that reminded fans of how the sport was to be played, like a game.

Limitations

As in any research there were limitations to the present study. The interpretive paradigm that was used in this study calls for extensive interviewing and analysis of those interviews. The qualitative design does not allow for researchers to sample as large a population as quantitative methods. The present study focused on interviewing 16 fans, rather than the hundreds that can be sampled in quantitative studies. Therefore the findings in this study may not be representative of a majority of the fans in the NHL, but rather fans in South Western Ontario, Southern Ontario, the Buffalo region, or perhaps the distinct few individuals who were interviewed for the present study.

Due to the timing of the investigation, interviewees were asked to recall their experiences as fans of the NHL. They were also asked to describe their experiences involving the lockout. The timing did not allow for the interviews to take place during the

lockout, therefore the researcher needed to rely on the fans to describe their recollections of the lockout. This was not the ideal condition, because the researcher is assuming that the recollections are reliable. Also, present emotions may be more powerful than recollected emotions, and could thus be contaminating the stories that are conveyed by the fans. It is difficult to ensure that the emotions conveyed by the fans were actually those that they experienced, because they had already begun to experience the aftermath of the lockout. This was an aftermath that most believed to override the negative emotions that they experienced due to the loss an entire NHL season. Perhaps the fans searched their memories and determined that the lockout was necessary because it led to the new NHL. However, at the time of the lockout, the fans may have had a different perspective as they could not predict the game to have changed so favourably, and consequently may have reported to have more negative feelings towards the lockout, the players, and/or the league than they reported to have during the post lockout interviews.

Another limitation was the sample population was predominantly young, when you consider the ages of the participants. These fans ranged from post secondary students, to newlyweds, to parents of preadolescent children. The only participant who did not fall within the ages of 21 and 39, Juanita was a single mother of three boys and can not be generalized to represent all fans of the NHL who are over the age of 39.

By interviewing fans from different age groups, it would have been interesting to determine whether middle aged and/or elderly fans of the NHL viewed the experience of the lockout to be different than was reported by the fans who were interviewed for the current investigation. For instance, an individual who has retired from his/her occupation may have chosen to purchase season's tickets to an NHL team, and views time spent at

an NHL arena as a time to socialize with friends. Thus the NHL lockout could have interrupted their social activity, forcing them to find an alternative social medium. This particular fan may have such negative feelings towards the lockout that they would remain with their new found social medium rather than returning to NHL arenas.

The fans who were interviewed for this present study were for the most part just starting their careers or in the integral development stage of their career. The fans were also very involved in the lives of their young children and did not have the time to consume themselves in the lockout, and thus they did not appear to harbour lingering negative emotions to the situation, thus allowing them to return to previous consumption practices with little opposition.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings in the study suggest that work stoppages in professional sport do not always result in negative consumption practices by their consumers upon the return of the league to play. The findings have shown that consumption practices can be increased if the fans deem that the league has implemented service recovery strategies that exceed their expectations. Future research should investigate the impact of successful, unsuccessful, and non-existent service recovery strategies on future consumption practices of leagues that have experienced work stoppages. Researchers should compare and contrast the impacts of the 1994 MLB strike with the 2004-2005 NHL lockout on league revenues, attendances, and television ratings in the years following the resolution of the labour dispute with those figures prior to the labour issues. This may provide sport marketers with tools to generate insights on how effectively to reintroduce fans to a brand after a work stoppage.

Another interesting finding that emerged from the present investigation was the increased presence of mothers as socializing agents for children's fandom of NHL teams. Future researchers should determine if mothers have become more prevalent in recent years in introducing their children to their favourite NHL teams. This could be done in a Canadian setting and/or American setting to determine if the prevalence of mothers as socializing agents is similar or different for the two countries. Investigators could then look into the impact of mothers in the development of loyalties to teams in all North American professional sport leagues. This investigation may also be expanded to a worldwide stage to view the prevalence of mothers as socializing agents for sport fans on a global platform.

A third interesting finding that should be investigated further is the role that classical conditioning plays in becoming and being a fan of a sport and/or team. Investigators could investigate the role of unconditioned and conditioned stimuli from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. Qualitative researchers may ask participants to relate their experiences playing a sport with their experiences as a fan of a sport and/or team. Quantitative researchers may investigate the physiological responses that individuals experience while playing a sport, such as heart rate in tense situations and compare that to the heart rate of fans while watching a game in at tense situations.

A fourth possible direction for future research that emerged from the findings in the present study should investigate the differences between loyal fans of junior hockey teams and NHL hockey teams. Fans reported that junior hockey was hockey at its roots. These players were reported to be playing for the fun of the game rather than a pay check. It would be interesting to determine whether individuals who choose to follow junior

hockey teams report to attach themselves with these teams for different reasons than do fans of NHL teams. If a difference is found between fans of junior and NHL teams researchers may wish to expand the investigation include all professional sports which have experienced labour disputes, and not simply hockey. The ability to differentiate between fans of junior and NHL teams will allow for sport marketers to direct their marketing strategies to the appropriate individuals.

Implications for Sport Marketers

The findings have presented interesting implications for sport marketers. The fans did not discuss the strategies employed by the NHL marketing departments when they spoke of the NHL returning to action. It became quite apparent that the fans were overwhelmed with the changes to the game itself. The league was changing structurally. It now had a salary cap, creating parity throughout the league. Players moved from team to team at a previously unseen of rate. The league was going to implement a mixture of some old and some new rules to improve the game.

Fans had been waiting for over a year for the return of the NHL, and they reported that the NHL did the best job they have ever done at creating hype prior to a season. In essence, by improving the game and the league, what the NHL did was implement a service recovery strategy that exceeded fans' expectations. In turn fans' consumption rates met and/or exceeded those that they had prior to the lockout. The NHL did not experience the negative effects that MLB did when they returned from their last work stoppage. Sport marketers should learn from what the NHL fans have told us. The fans were not happy that the lockout took place, and were even less happy that the lockout lasted as long as it did. What the fans understood is that the lockout was necessary to

achieve the goal of a salary cap which would create parity among teams in the league. Marketers must explain to fans why the work stoppage is taking place, and convey to fans that a positive outcome may result from the negotiations. NHL fans have shown that communication between the league and/or the players' association and the fans can reduce the negative effects that have previously been experienced by professional sports leagues after work stoppages in the past.

A second interesting finding for implication of sport marketers is that mothers appear to be more prevalent as socializing agents for young fans of the NHL. It may prove beneficial for NHL teams to promote mother-son and mother-daughter promotional days at the rink. It is not that mothers were reported to be more prevalent as socializing agents than fathers were reported to be, but they were found to be important in the formation of a loyal fandom for many of the fans who were interviewed. Mother-child promotional events could be an untapped attendance increasing strategy that may provide marketers with a strategy to increase popularity of their team by generating new fans, and thus generating increased revenues.

A third finding that may have implications for sport marketers is the fans desire for parity throughout a league. The fans reported to enjoy the parity that was achieved because of the lockout. Each of the 30 teams in the NHL now has a chance at signing the best players. There are no teams that can outspend all the others, because there is a cap on the amount they can pay in players' salaries each year. This should prove interesting to sport marketers, especially those who work for the front offices of major professional sport leagues. Fans voiced their desire for parity between all teams in a league. As 24 year-old Wes alluded to, parity calls for General Managers and Coaches to be at their

bests for their teams to win. General Managers will no longer be able to simply buy big name players, because no team can spend more than the salary cap.

League officials should strive to implement parity throughout their league. Once parity is achieved they should then implement marketing strategies that indicate that each team has an equal opportunity to win a championship that year. Perhaps a commercial that is aired at the beginning of the season can show all of the logos being thrown into a hat indicating that only the season will tell which of these teams will win the championship at year's end.

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APPENDIX A

January 2006

NHL FANS NEEDED



Are you loyal to a NHL team?
Would you like to share your feelings concerning the 2004-2005 NHL lockout?

The National Hockey League is one of the four North American major professional sports leagues. It is the most recent league to experience a labour dispute which resulted in the cancellation of the entire 2004-2005 NHL season. The experience of being a fan of a NHL team during the lockout provides an extremely interesting framework for scholarly study. The research project in which you are being invited to participate is entitled, "An Examination of NHL Fans' Reactions to the Cancelled 2004-2005 Season". I am a graduate student at Brock University and will be conducting the study. My main area of interest is fan behaviour and fan loyalty research. The purpose of this study is to examine fans' experiences during the NHL lockout and upon the return of the NHL, to understand the effects of the lockout on present and future fan involvement with the NHL.

Your involvement is greatly appreciated and will help to further my understanding about fans' experiences during the NHL lockout. I hope to conduct interviews of fans loyal to a NHL team, to gain a better understanding of your experiences throughout the lockout and after the lockout. The interviews will be approximately 1 hour in length and will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon location and with participants' approval will be audiotaped. Questions within the interviews will attempt to gain a deeper understanding of your experiences throughout the lockout and upon the return of the NHL, and how these experiences translate to consumption.

The study in which you are being asked to participate will involve loyal fans of the NHL. Results from this study will be used to enhance my understanding of experience of being a fan during the NHL lockout. A written summary of the findings will be made available to all participants. Further distribution of the results may occur in academic journals and conference presentations; however, the specific identity of the participants in the study will not be disclosed. Any information that arises from participants will be treated with strict confidentiality and access to information that might identify participants will be limited to my Faculty Advisor and myself. The names of specific participants in the study will not be attached to comments or issues raised within project reports or presentations generated from this study. The interviews will be recorded for analysis purposes. All audiotapes of interviews will be kept under lock and key, with access by only myself, for a duration of five years upon completion of this study. Participation in this study is voluntary and individuals may decline answering any question(s) within the survey or interview that may be found offensive or intrusive. Participants may also withdraw from the study at any stage in the process without fear of penalty or reprisal.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through REB (file # 05-101).

Following the completion of the study I will send participants an executive summary of the results. Should you have any further questions concerning the interviews or the study in general, please feel free to contact me by e-mail at ca04wb@brocku.ca. Additionally, information can be obtained from my Faculty supervisor, Dr. Lucie Thibault in the Sport Management Department at Brock University at Lucie.Thibault@brocku.ca or by telephone 905-688-5550 ext. 3112. Any concerns about the ethics of this study may be directed to the Brock University Research Ethics Officer in the Office of Research Services at 905-688-5550, extension 3035 or reb@brocku.ca.

Sincerely
Chad Asselstine
Master of Arts Student – Brock University

**Brock University, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
Informed Consent Form- Participants – Interviews**

Title of Study: An Examination of NHL Fans' Reactions to the Cancelled 2004-2005 Season

Principal Researcher: Chad Asselstine, Department of Sport Management

Name of participant: (please print) _____

- I have been given and have read the Letter of Invitation provided to me by the interviewer conducting the research.
- I understand that this study in which I have agreed to participate will involve my participation in an interview that will last for approximately one hour. The purpose of this investigation is to gain an understanding of the experience of being a loyal fan of an NHL team during the NHL lockout of 2004-2005.
- I understand that the interviews will be audio taped for research purposes if consent is granted.
- I understand that the audio tapes will only be accessed by the Principal Investigator and his Faculty Advisor, and that the audio tapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty.
- I understand that I may ask questions of the researchers at any point during the research process.
- I understand that the researcher will provide me with a printed transcript of the interview to ensure its accuracy
- I understand that there is no obligation to answer any question(s) that I feel is invasive, offensive or inappropriate.
- I understand that there will be no payment for my participation.
- I understand that all personal information will be kept strictly confidential and that all information will be coded so that my name is not associated with my answers.
- I understand that only the Principal Investigator, Chad Asselstine and his Faculty Advisor will have access to the data, and that information seen by the Faculty Advisor will not identify the name of the participant. I also understand that the researcher and his Faculty Advisor not discuss the study outside of research meetings, behind closed doors.
- I understand that a summary of the results will be made available to the participants in the study.
- I understand that I will be contacted by phone, email, or mail requesting permission to include my information in any future research before it will be included.
- A copy of this consent form is provided to you for your own records.
- As indicated by my signature below, I acknowledge that I am participating freely and willingly and I am providing my consent.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Brock Research Ethics Board (File # _05-101_)

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you may contact Chad Asselstine by e-mail at ca04wb@brocku.ca. Additionally, information can be obtained from my Faculty supervisor, Dr. Lucie Thibault in the Sport Management Department at Brock University at Lucie.Thibault@brocku.ca or by telephone 905-688-5550 ext. 3112. Concerns about your involvement in the study may also be directed to Brock University Research Ethics Officer in the Office of Research Services at 905-688-5550, extension 3035 or reb@brocku.ca.

Feedback about the use of the data collected will be available in March 2006, from Chad Asselstine in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University.

Thank you for your help! Please take one copy of this form with you for further reference.

Signature of the Participant: _____ Date: _____

I have fully explained the procedures of this study to the above volunteer.

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to be part of my research study.

Confidentiality is important to me and I want to emphasize that any information that could reveal your identity will be not be included in any presentations or written reports or papers. A reminder too that your participation is entirely voluntary, and that you may stop the interview or skip any question at any time during the interview.

The purpose of this interview is to gain a greater understanding of the experience of the 2004-2005 NHL lockout on loyal fans of NHL teams. I'm interested in what you think, and of course, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers.

Question #1

How did you originally become a fan of a team in the NHL?

Question #2

Could you share a story of an event that has taken place in your life involving the NHL?

Question #3

What was it like being a fan of the NHL prior to the lockout?

Question #4

Could you describe your favourite NHL team?

Question #5

Tell me about your feelings concerning the lockout.

Question #6

How did your life change with the absence of the NHL?

Question #7

How did you anticipate reacting to the return of the NHL?

Thank you for your time. Should I have any further questions or need to confirm or clarify what we discussed in the interview, may I contact you? - - If yes, - - Can I take your contact information down and I will call you in the next few weeks if further information needs to be discussed and for you to review the interview transcripts.

I greatly appreciate your participation!

Demographic Survey

Instructions:

Please choose the most appropriate response as it pertains to you.

1. Gender

Male_____

Female_____

2. Age

18-29_____

30-39_____

40-49_____

50-59_____

60-69_____

70+_____

3. Please indicate your current hometown _____

4. Please indicate your hometown at the time that your first became aware of the NHL

5. Please indicate your favourite NHL team _____

Thank you for your time and honest responses!